

THORNS AND THISTLES

(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A REVOLUTIONARY)

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Author: Before he was imprisoned

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE BIRTH OF AN IDEA

I CAME to Lahore in 1922 from Barki, a suburb of Gujarkhan. The city charmed me with its buildings, shops, roads, and crowds of people. I was about nine, but looked older than my years. I would slip out of my home and run wild after the things that caught my imagination. My interest was aroused and I would wander round the city even at the risk of losing my way, thus causing many anxious moments of search and trouble to my mother and elder brother. I saw groups of men shouting against the foreign yoke ; piles of foreign cloth burning to ashes, and heard the speakers telling the people to wear simple khadi. I knew that a fight against the white man was on, and learnt the songs of freedom that were sung by the people. The great bonfires and vehement speeches exerted a mysterious charm upon me and I imbibed the impression that something very big and bold was being done by our people.

I had joined the Khalsa High School. Those were the days of the Akali Movement, and the boys of the school were very agitated and indignant at the massacre of scores of people at Nankana Sahib. I wanted to have a sword like many of them. I longed for a musket and cartridges, the weapons of those who had killed our countrymen. Many boys, including myself, had volunteered for service in Akali Jathas, but our offer was rejected on grounds of our tender age.

I had heard many a legend about the Babar Akalis. Their method of challenging the oppressors of our nation vaguely but unmistakably appealed to my emotions and made me think of bold steps and courageous deeds. The mass movements of the people filled me with enthusiasm, though I knew not what to do. *The upsurge of lofty patriotic emotions thrilled me though I could not tell why!*

One day my mother told me as I returned from school: "It is good, my son, that you were not at home to see the heart-rending scene that we saw."

My mother was a magnetic personality. She had been the embodiment of courage and calmness in moments of danger.

I had never seen her gloomy. Seeing her still visibly moved, I felt that something terrible had happened. She explained that a cart had passed by in front of our house carrying the dead bodies of hanged Babar Akalis, including a young boy who was a mere child. I vividly remember how the idea of being put to death with a rope gripped my imagination.

"How did he look like, lying dead?" "Was he much bigger than I?" "What was the cart made of?" "Who drove the cart?" I asked many such questions, but my mother gave evasive replies. I could not discover the why and wherefore of the boy's hanging. He had done something extraordinary and something extraordinary was done to him. This idea filled my mind. Perhaps I might have been overawed if I had actually seen him lying amidst a heap of dead bodies. The sacrifice of his life made me his devotee.

Four or five boys of my age living in the neighbourhood became enthusiastic anti-whites like me and were in search of an opportunity to show their mettle. We were careful lest our guardians or parents should come to know of our dangerous thoughts. Seized with feelings of oppression, we hid ourselves behind the gates of the Islamia High School, close to our house, and threw stones at the car of a European passing by. It gave us a peculiar sense of satisfaction and relief, though we had all missed the mark. The next time we concealed ourselves in the verandah of the Islamia School, and remained long on the lookout for a white man's car. Friday was our day of attack because the school remained closed and there was no one there to spy upon us. We usually ran away through the rear of the building without waiting to see the result of our onslaught. At times a stone or two hit the body of a car that went away without stopping. One day the glass of a car was broken and its occupant, a wily European with frightful features, stopped and caught sight of us running in wild haste towards the back of the school. He showed no inclination to run after us, but going straight to the shop of S. Dhian Singh and Sons, made a complaint to them that their boys had done the mischief. We could not understand how he came to know that we were tenants of S. Dhian Singh, but it was clear to us that we were caught. A severe rebuke was in store for us.

The desire to become a revolutionary was born and growing. It was synonymous with my childish aspirations to become a hero. I had learnt something of Sikh history at school. Whilst I was in the fifth class one of the teachers, an impressive young

man, used to stir up strong feelings in the students by reciting the episodes of Guru Gobind Singh's life. He would occasionally tell us about recent happenings in the country and one day he incidentally mentioned the *Kamagata Maru* incident and the 1914-15 conspiracy. I could not understand the real causes of the failure of the conspiracy and felt that we would have been free but for the treachery of a single person, Kirpal Singh. I had full confidence in the ability of the 1914-15 conspirators to drive the foreigners out of India. I had also been taught that the Sikh Raj was lost, not because of British valour in arms but through their treachery and deceit against their former ally, the minor Maharaja Dalip Singh.

CHAPTER 2

MORE OF THE WORLD

MY mother had an auspicious aspect about her, enhanced in effect by her confidence in herself and trust in others. She wielded the most beneficial influence over me as she did over all the members of our family and near relatives. Family quarrels, big and small, lost their bitterness even before they reached her ears. She had brought good luck to her parents when she was born. She married my father and his fortune began to improve. He was a happy prosperous business man at the time of his death. His partner in trade gave us nothing though our share must have been worth more than a lakh of rupees at least. My elder brother, S. Kartar Singh, was a minor then. Our father's death brought him back home from Rawalpindi where he had been attending school. He wanted to file a civil suit against our father's partner, and many respectable citizens of Gujarkhan offered to help him in that connection, but our mother disliked the idea of going to court and her views prevailed. She asked my brother to try his luck elsewhere and he came to Lahore. We left Gujarkhan permanently for Lahore when the business newly started by S. Kartar Singh began to prosper under the patient guidance of our mother. She had regained for us a respectable position in society. My elder married sisters and other near relatives were always vying with one another to have

her with them for a month or two every year. She would sometimes yield to their persistent requests and be their guest for some days in their respective homes when the conditions of our household permitted. She was fortunate in being loved and respected by all.

I was attached to her by deep sentiments. I was the youngest and she loved me the most. Her unexpected death, on the 21st of February 1928, came as a great shock to us. I had seen her silently suffer from intense pain caused by a gall-stone. She had a chain of tumours in her breast for the last few months. I used to sit by her side trying to fathom the depth of her suffering, but she would smoothen her features drawn with pain and caress me with her hand and talk and smile and send me away to do some work or play. She had undergone an operation that did not succeed. Another operation was performed and this time too it did not prove successful. We lost her forever.

My mother's death made the home a lonely place for me. Though for sometime our fortune in business continued to increase, it reached its highest peak and then began to dwindle. I could not find the motherly affection in my brothers. My disposition was too sensitive to submit to the authority of my brothers when it was imposed in an unthinking, unsympathetic way. I felt the usual pinpricks and irritations of life in an average Indian home. A youngster like me passing through the most difficult period of a young man's life could little understand, much less appreciate, the fundamental soundness of an uninspiring and slightly disagreeable life. Emotions flamed up my dim and flickering light. I rose to heights of happiness and fell into depths of despair on the slightest provocation. My moods were a problem to my guardians as also to myself. A nervous unrest began to urge for a change.

I began to take more interest, as I grew older, in the big political events which were happening in the country. I frequently went to our shop in the Anarkali Bazaar and heard my elder brothers and others discuss the news in the daily papers. Their comments made me turn the pages of the vernacular papers and read the news for myself. I became a regular reader and soon acquired an avid interest in the news about the activities of Indian revolutionaries. The Kakori Case and the death sentence carried out in that connection greatly perturbed me emotionally.

I can vividly recall the memories of the day when the news-

paper vendor had come shouting to our shop in his familiar voice,

“ Assembly men Bomb Chal Giya! ”

The news was splashed on the first page of the paper.

I hastily ran through it before my brother came from inside the shop and took the newspaper away. I was now about fifteen and could think of myself becoming an active revolutionary. The slogans of the Congressites and the bonfires of foreign cloth no more satisfied me as they had in the past. Those who had thrown bombs in the Central Assembly had more courage, more audacity, and I was attracted by their creed. Why did not Bhagat Singh and Dutt, the bomb-throwers, run away in the confusion caused by the explosions? I wondered why they allowed themselves to be caught. And I thought “ Supposing I knew how to make bombs! ”

I wanted to learn the technique of bomb-making and set about to obtain the necessary information. But there was nobody to help me. My hunger remained unsatisfied. Nobody could give me the knowledge I needed. I felt all alone with a great idea and an obsession about the freedom of my country.

CHAPTER 3

THE UNSHEATHING OF THE SWORD

JASWANT RAI, a friend of mine, used to meet me often. Sometimes I called on him at his house and our talks usually centred on current politics. Though a bit of a Gandhiite he was not disinterested in terrorism and revolutionaries. He seemed to be trying to hold a balance between the two conflicting modes of thought. He knew I was collecting information regarding the manufacture of bombs but he was never enthusiastic about it. One day in an unusual fit of confidence he divulged the secret of his having organised a revolutionary party. I was intrigued and electrified at this piece of news.

My heart began to beat fast. I looked impatiently at him while he slowly and cautiously told the story of his having taken part in a meeting held at the house of a revolutionary, Pandit

Inderpal. He and some of his friends were present at the Pandit's house when the latter chalked out a programme for terroristic activities and explained the urgency of carrying it out.

Jaswant Rai told me nothing beyond this, but he added that he was not totally against organised terrorist activity, though he could not himself take an active part because of his family. "My aged mother would die the day she heard of my arrest," he said.

"Why did you take part in the secret discussions then?" I asked.

"One of the reasons was that I knew how interested you would feel about the talks and their outcome," was his reassuring reply.

I asked him to introduce me to Pandit Inderpal and he agreed to take me to him at 4 P.M. the next day.

I reached the Pandit's house at the appointed hour. It was a dilapidated building in Chowk Jhanda, the upper portion of which was cracked and the wall facing south had a dangerous inclination downwards. It looked as though it were waiting for its fall. It was a befitting abode only for courageous people, I thought. I halted for a few seconds before the stairs and then began to mount them. I went straight to the central room in the second storey, and saw that it was almost empty with hardly a trace of anyone living in it. I felt puzzled looking on all sides. There was a short narrow staircase leading into a very beautiful old-fashioned balcony, where at the moment three copy-writers were busy at their work. One of them was Inderpal, who asked me to come upstairs. He rose and embraced me heartily.

Jaswant Rai exclaimed in a pleasant mood, "We were waiting for you!"

The balcony had rung out with my footsteps. On closer examination it looked like the one I had seen in the Lahore Fort, just above the front of Diwan-i-Khas, said to have been the seat of Moghul kings.

The Pandit arranged the papers scattered around him and put them in a corner. He was a lean, upright young man, uncouth in appearance, but he seemed to gain an ease and polish apparently not natural to him, the moment he spoke. The eyes of a visionary began to shine, reflecting an unusual interest as our conversation progressed. I felt he had a strong capacity to appreciate and see more than there was in one. There was, however, nothing insincere about him. His talk, his gestures, his particularly undemonstrative way of bringing out serious things for discussion, were positive proof of an integrated personality.

He was a swarthy mountaineer from Kangra and had a hard core of reality beneath his simple talk that was in no way remarkable. He was not a man of argument. He understood my point and accepted or rejected it without any hesitation or wavering.

It was a comfortable place, this wooden balcony of the medieval ages, through whose good old windows the air streamed into our midst from the great maidan of the market place below.

Jaswant Rai had some business to attend to and went away. So did the other companions of Pandit Inderpal. He said, "You will agree with me that Jaswant is a very good friend but not an ideal revolutionary. He is, for example, unable to oppose the will of his elder brother who forbids him to associate with us. He is under the influence of his relatives. It matters little that he is politically conscious when he cannot feel free enough to take part in political activity. I do not intend to prejudice you against him, and have perhaps indulged in superfluous talk."

"You have exactly repeated my own thoughts about him," I said, and added after a pause, "but last night he told me he had become a member of a terrorist party."

The Pandit hastily replied. "No such party exists as yet. There was merely an idle talk and I think we should no more indulge in loose talk, because neither Jaswant Rai nor his friends can suit us." He looked out of the window for a while and then said, "There is a friend of mine, an important member of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army. He used to come for monetary help from me but I have heard nothing about him for three or four months. He is sure to come some day but I think I cannot be satisfied even if he enlists me as an active member of his party. Why not try to start an independent organisation of our own?"

"We should," was my considered opinion. The word "independent" had always a charm for me. We set about to discuss the details.

"Jaswant Rai has told me that you have some formulae for making bombs?" I asked.

He nodded in assent. He informed me that he had some papers left by Yashpal, his revolutionary friend. There were two books on explosives which he showed me but they were concerned with blasting on a high scale and of little use to us. We decided to make experiments for explosives used in small bombs. We agreed that there was no need for the present to enrol party members.

About financing the scheme he told me that he was earning more than a hundred rupees per month and his companion Pandit Rupchand was also earning about as much. He hoped to have enough for carrying out experiments.

I was very satisfied at this business-like coming to decisions. All was settled between us and I had now to begin trying various formulae at our disposal. I was happy to have met a friend like Pandit Inderpal. He had the intelligence and energy for work and ambitious plans for the future.

Pandits Inderpal and Rupchand were too busy to help me in the experiments which I carried out in a small and separate room in the third storey of the house. I could give but a little of my time in the evening as I was still a student at school, and moreover, had to satisfy my brothers with plausible reasons for my daily absence from home for a few hours.

Yashpal, the organiser of the Punjab branch of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, began to visit Inderpal's house frequently at this time. He had been declared an absconder in the first Lahore Conspiracy Case and needed monetary and other help.

Our activities increased and I decided to leave my home. Pandit Inderpal was happy at the prospect of my doing whole-time work. Experimental work was interesting and I began to pay more and more attention to it.

One day the Pandit told me that Yashpal had asked him to be prepared to leave Lahore for a month or two and that he had agreed to be sent on a special work for the main Party.

He remained outside Lahore for about two months. Meanwhile Pandit Rupchand had to shift to another place in Gawal Mandi in order to save expenses. I too had to put off experiments for lack of funds.

In those days there was great activity in Congress circles in Lahore as the date of the All-India Congress Session was drawing near. The country was on the verge of a non-violent storm which was to sweep away British imperialism. Mahatma Gandhi was in correspondence with Lord Irwin, the Viceroy. On the 23rd of December a wave of sensation swept through the country at the news of an attempt to blow up the viceregal train. A struggle and not a truce with the Viceroy was what the attempt signified. It gave a fillip to the radical elements participating in the Congress session.

Pandit Inderpal came back the day after the explosion. He told the story of the important part he had played in the "action."

The members of the main Party in contact with him were satisfied with his work, but he was critical of theirs. He was still linked with them as he was not confident of being successful independently.

A few days later Yashpal brought a packet of typed papers and asked Pandit Inderpal to have a copy of them prepared for him. The latter instructed me and Pandit Rupchand to make two copies, one of which was to be kept for ourselves. Here I found useful formulae for making bombs.

Yashpal was experiencing difficulties in collecting funds for the Party. A revolutionary has to disclose his identity and argue and explain the necessity and usefulness of the creed of violence, before he is given any monetary help.

Yashpal did not like the idea of committing dacoities because of the risk of murder involved in them. Such murders, according to him, antagonised the people and made it easy for the Government to send able and promising young men to the gallows. He cited the example of the Kakori Case where an unsuccessful dacoity had cost so many precious lives. He explained these views at length to Pandit Inderpal and put before him the proposal for starting a small mint of our own. The money coined there could well meet all the expenses of the Party. He knew a man who could help with his experience in the matter, and offered to bring him to us. The man, however, was ill and subject to hysteric fits.

Yashpal left, and Pandit Inderpal told me about his views and his proposal and wanted to know my opinion about them. He for his own part was in favour of utilising the services of Yashpal's man and regarded counterfeiting as better than committing dacoities for the purpose of raising funds. He wanted me to take charge of the proposed work and give it a practical shape. I consented.

Meanwhile some Islamia College students had stolen scientific equipment from their College laboratory. A magic lantern show was being held in the College hall, when the students, according to their pre-arranged plan, taking advantage of the noise in the hall and the darkness outside, broke through the windows of the laboratory and entering haphazardly took out scientific instruments, acids and any other material they could lay their hands upon. They inscribed with chalk the following words in bold letters on the blackboard: "We are taking scientific material in the interests of the country," and then left the place.

These students had conspired together to make bombs for terror-

ist activities and the theft was planned in that connection. The thing they required most was some picric acid and they thought they had actually taken out two bottles of it. A large quantity of equipment was stolen but no plans had been made for its safe keeping. It was much more than was required for making explosives and they had to distribute it among themselves and disperse as soon as they could. They learnt later on that the most necessary article, the picric acid, was lost somewhere in the confusion that ensued after the theft.

They resolved to prepare the acid themselves. A safe place for experiments was required*and they chose a room in the house of one of their comrades, the nephew of a responsible C.I.D. officer, who they knew returned from his office in the evening, and so they worked while he was out. One day the room was filled with odorous fumes when the officer was about to return. They had all the day carried on research work but the wrong mixing of acids had brought them no nearer success. They had concealed the equipment and cleared out when the officer arrived. He could easily guess what had happened because he knew about the recent theft in the Islamia College. The students committed some other mistakes, and thus the full story of their activities became known to the C.I.D. in a few days.

Arrests and searches were now feared and the students found themselves in a dilemma, not knowing where to dispose of the stolen material. One of them, whom I shall call Mr. A., was a friend of mine. He had once hinted to me about his efforts to organise a revolutionary group among the students. I met him one day after the Islamia College theft, and he disclosed to me that he was one of the organisers of the group that had begun "work." He was an M.A. student of the same College.

He saw me in connection with the disposal of the stolen scientific equipment and sought my help. I was only too willing to take charge of all material but the difficulty was to keep secret from him the place where I was to take it, knowing full well that he and several other students were being followed by the police and were going to be arrested at any moment. I therefore told him to collect all the material and send it in a tonga to a certain place outside Taxali Gate which was only an untenanted open house. His man, Mr. B., came to the appointed place in a tonga laden with three trunks fully packed with equipment. I deposited the trunks in the open courtyard of the above-mentioned house and waited for Mr. B. to go. He himself was in fact in a nervous haste to return. I called in another tonga a few minutes after

his departure and carried the trunks to the house of our Party tenanted by Pandit Inderpal. Later on I learnt that the police had in the course of their enquiries gone to the vacant house outside Taxali Gate, but could obtain no information about a certain Sikh whom they wanted to trace.

Several Muhammadan students, among them a Hindu, were arrested by the police, but strangely enough Mr. A. was left alone. He explained to me that he had not taken any important part in the theft case and that his not being arrested was largely due to his being a near relative of a Deputy Superintendent of the C.I.D.

Pandit Inderpal expressed the opinion that there was the risk of my being declared an absconder in the Islamia College theft case. I had now all the material required for experimenting in explosives but Pandit Inderpal advised me to postpone that kind of work and to give my attention to coin-making. Bhag Ram, Yashpal's man, had come from Jammu and was staying with us.

Bhag Ram was a well-built man of about forty, to all appearance a peaceful soul with suave manners and a mild way of dealing with people, his gentle nature bubbling into interesting, genial talk. We entrained for Jammu on the day of the Basant festival of 1930. All articles used in the making of coins had been brought from Lahore, because Bhag Ram had told me that even ordinary ones would not be available at Jammu. His relatives lived in Jammu, but he could not go to stay with them, and took me to the house of a friend, a private tutor in the city.

It transpired that Bhag Ram had no practical knowledge of coining though he could minutely explain its theory, not forgetting a single detail. I did not even know the A.B.C. of the job and set about to solve the practical problem. Having to face difficulties at every step was but natural. Bhag Ram brought some books on the subject of melting of metals and I went through them. After strenuous efforts for about three long months, a rupee coin, accurate in size and perfect in sounding, was prepared. We had succeeded in finding out the alloy and had mastered the art of making moulds, but failed to make coins in a large quantity in an easy and paying way. We required a good deal of practice.

Bhag Ram had, during this period, gone to Lahore three or four times, in order to bring certain articles we required in our work. Someone distributed leaflets of an objectionable kind in the city, on the day of his coming back for the last time. An officer on duty at the only bridge that links the city with the

Railway station had seen him come from outside. He was, moreover, known to be doing no work in the city and the police strongly suspected him of distributing the above-mentioned leaflets.

Jammu is not a very large city, but it has a big force of police and C.I.D. (with little work to do). An unusual expression of their gregarious instinct is evidenced whenever they have some work in hand. They began to patrol the bazaar in which our house was situated. They sat down in plain clothes in front of the house and followed every person who came in or went out. They made us panicky. We had indeed nothing to do with the distribution of leaflets but it would have been much better to be arrested on that account rather than for counterfeiting. Rightly observed Bhag Ram, "It is a State. The police will throw us into a dungeon, and nobody will know anything about us for a long period to come." Our host, a none-too-inquisitive gentleman, who remained out of the house as long as he could in the day was not a member of the Party, though he knew we were revolutionaries and, because of his friendship with Bhag Ram, was indirectly helping us. We did not want him to be put to trouble on our account. Many such considerations weighed with us and we decided to destroy all the coin-making material—the furnace, the moulds and even the pieces of silver in our possession.

The police had not made up their mind to come in when we went out under cover of darkness and caught the train for Lahore. We resolved to give up the idea of coin-making once and for all.

I happened to meet Mr. B. a few minutes later in the bazaar. He was the student who had brought the stolen equipment in a tonga for me. Taking me aside he accused Mr. A. of being in the employment of the C.I.D. He vehemently criticised his conduct of first inciting the students to commit illegal acts and subsequently giving full information to the officials.

I already regarded Mr. A. as a doubtful person and now began to observe his habits more carefully; but his was a slippery personality, never allowing a closer understanding. He began to talk about trivial things when I naturally expected him to ask me questions. He never tried to elicit any information from me regarding my underground activities though without doubt he knew that I was a revolutionary. I realised that among other things timidity stood in his way.

He met me often. One day while we were strolling in the Circular Garden, he unexpectedly pressed my shoulder and asked, "What will you do, if one day perchance you become suspicious of me?"

I saw that to all appearance he was a bit nervous and afraid.

I informed him in gentle words that I should warn my friends in such a case.

More agitated, he inquired, "What will they do then?"

"I can't say for certain," I replied.

"At the most what can they do?" he asked in bewilderment.

"They can pass a death sentence," was my calm observation.

He became silent as if in protest against something flagrantly offensive in my remark. He had an injured look about him. Perhaps he expected a non-serious, mild answer which could be lightly taken by him. My seriousness about him did not appeal to his reason, and he recoiled from the idea of any hostile intention on my part against him in the future. Our talk could not be resumed in the mood in which he was. We parted and went away in different directions.

We did not meet each other for several days. The idea of his possibly proving a traitor fit to be shot had come between us though I had never thought of the possibility of his becoming a member of our Party. How could he betray us when he knew nothing about our activities? He did not in my view know even my residence. Why then had he made so much of a remark which was only a theoretical answer to the question he had deliberately asked? I had accepted the stolen material from his hands and thereby given him the positive proof of my being connected with actual revolutionary work. It was now more

necessary for me to avoid meeting him, but he happened to come across me again.

We met by chance in the Circular Garden. He was cordial as usual, but I could clearly read a look of suspicion in his countenance as I had noted last time. He said he was too frightened to meet me very often and added in a subdued voice, "You are a revolutionary, a desperate fellow. The like of you do not believe in friendship or kinship. Your physiognomy and the impression that a casual observer may take of you, coupled with your erstwhile friendship with me have made me feel like meeting you again and again, but fear holds me back. Can't you promise that you will at once tell me whenever you become suspicious of me?"

He had uttered these words holding back a little as if in expectation of an unwelcome answer, and I replied that I was not that sort of revolutionary who cannot understand the need for friendship and loyalty in human relationship. "Your fears are due to the rumours your college friends have been spreading against you, but you ought not to mind," I said, and asked, "Why should you be afraid of anybody when you mean no harm to him?"

"I mean no harm to you," he declared with an easy expression on his face.

He met me quite often after this. He would at times try to dissuade me from taking part in secret work. He especially disliked the following basis for argument, "Life is an adventure. We should wage a relentless war against injustice while our blood is warm." He never seemed to be reconciled to the idea of my being a patriot.

CHAPTER 4

"THE WHEEL OF FIRE"

WE were too many in the single-room house rented by Pandit Rupchand during Pandit Inderpal's absence from Lahore. The room was situated above a betel seller's shop in the Sabzi Mandi Chauk of Gawal Mandi, and in front of it was the roof above four or five other shops serving as our courtyard. Pandit Inderpal's two younger brothers and Rupchand's brother were

school students and there were two more young boys from Kangra allowed free boarding and lodging by Pandit Inderpal, who taught them the art of copy-writing in order to enable them to earn their own livelihood. My elder brother S. Amrik Singh usually came to stay with us. A member or two of the main Party also would now and then find shelter in the same place for a few days. We slept outside on the spacious roof upon outworn mattresses, except on a rainy day against which there could be no adequate provision.

Pandit Rupchand was the sole earning member nowadays, because Pandit Inderpal could not work regularly on account of Party work. The failure of our coin-making enterprise had added not a little to our economic difficulties. Crowning all these anxieties was the thought of Pandit Inderpal's day of marriage drawing nearer. There was no going back on the plighted word in the Kangra district to which he and his would-be father-in-law belonged.

The Pandit would have desired anything but marriage at this stage of uncertainty about his future. He invented various reasons for having it postponed for a year or so, but nobody would listen to him, not even his sister who was living at Lahore. Marriage was a solemn responsibility and he was of too serious a nature to take it lightly.

The police were investigating the Viceregal Train Case and there was the ever-present chance of his being arrested any of these days if some clue was found out. "Any way," he said, "postponement is the best course. If I am not arrested for at least six months more I shall marry. My would-be father-in-law and the members of his family will have to reconsider their views about the promise of marriage if I was arrested in the meanwhile and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. I should tell them what a risk they were taking by insisting on the celebration of the marriage on the appointed date."

None of the Party members objected to this enforced disclosure of a Party secret, if it was to help him in any way, but he himself on second thoughts changed his mind seeing what a hopeless fuss he might create to no purpose as it was practically impossible for his conventional kinsfolk even to think of going back on the plighted word. Moreover, there was less uncertainty about his future now, than there would be later on, in view of his resolve to carry on the Party work, come whatever may. "Let her suffer with me, if I can't help it," he declared in all earnestness.

He persuaded his sister to try to get the marriage postponed, but without success. There arose the financial problem but it was solved by his sister. The marriage took place on the appointed day. Several Party members including myself took part in its celebrations, but there was nothing revolutionary about us except our jokes, only half-appreciated by the uninitiated.

Our activities were on the increase. Hans Raj surnamed "Wireless," a wiry young man hailing from Lyallpur, had become acquainted with Pandit Inderpal during his stay in Delhi, and had lately become attached to our group. Bhag Ram visited us after short intervals and took part in our deliberations aimed at chalking out a definite programme.

I would close the door leading to the stairs upwards, and thus improvise a miniature laboratory wherein I could carry on experiments till the school-going children came back. It was an interesting work; rather an absorbing hobby. I had no former knowledge of chemistry and learnt and unlearnt in a process similar to that undergone by a barbarian reaching a civilised stage. My labours met with success, at last. The explosive was ready. I tested it in a very small quantity in the laboratory that was a path leading to the stairs. I compared it with the specimens Yashpal had left with us.

Now it remained to test the strength of the explosive in a bomb filled with it. A crude bomb was prepared for this purpose and four of us, Pandit Inderpal, Bhag Ram, Hans Raj and I went out of the city to the river-bank, to carry out a test. We left our bicycles under a tree and going a few hundred yards farther ignited the bomb. It exploded with a terrific noise, frightening the cattle in the fields and the birds on the trees. We found no bomb-splinters. So the explosive was a success, all the greater as it had enabled us to work independently of the main Party. In the all-pervading lack of technical knowledge and skill, the bomb was the pivot, the rallying point of terrorist organisations.

The *Satyagraha* movement launched by the Congress was in full swing. And so was the repression by the police. Utilising to the fullest extent the absence of any form of violence amongst the Congressmen the police had started an unchallenged regime of terror, aimed at demoralisation of the masses. There was universal resentment against the excesses of the police, and the mounting wrath of our people shifted from the real enemy of our rightful aspirations, to those servicemen who overstepped the boundaries of established law in their frantic but vain attempts

to stem the rising tide of freedom. Even the children in the streets hurled epithets and queer phrases in the face of these custodians of the law. The fear of lathi charges, arrests and shootings had gone out of the minds of the patriots, but they showed no retaliatory spirit. We felt it our duty to impress upon the police what was in store for them if they went on unchecked in their barbarous policy towards the people.

The question that arose foremost before us was how best to meet the terror of the police with a terror of our own. If we could only accomplish something of the sort, subject to the limitations of our resources! We felt we were sure to gain immense sympathy from the public.

Hans Raj "Wireless" put forth his suggestion for making decoy-bombs and explained how they could be used against the police. Bhag Ram asked during the discussions that ensued whether he intended murders on a large scale.

"There is the chance of a few policemen being killed," replied Hans Raj.

Bhag Ram sounded a note of warning: "Our Party has not fully begun functioning as yet, and we would be finished in a few days, with none left behind to carry on revolutionary work, if we committed murders at the outset," he said. "I am totally against taking the life of anyone, unless there is no alternative left to us," he declared.

He was a comrade of wide experience which brings in comparative calmness in one's deliberations, and his words always carried weight with all of us. Discussions of a complicated nature continued for a few days. A new and more complicated problem faced us. How to make the bombs which would serve the purpose of "adequate punishment" and yet not kill?

It was decided to use tin-covers in place of iron-shells in bombs. A specimen was prepared and tested in an open field outside the city. We were satisfied at the moderate results obtained. A few days' more deliberations perfected our scheme for simultaneous bomb-outrages at various places in the province. The action, as our leaflets described, was to prove one of the series the Atshi-chakkar Party (our anti-police branch of the main organisation) meant to carry out if the police did not change their barbarous method of dealing with non-violent *Satyagrahis* and their sympathisers.

Simultaneous explosions occurred on the morning of the 19th of June, 1930, at Lahore, Amritsar, Lyallpur, Gujranwala, Sheikhupura and Rawalpindi. A police Havildar was fatally wounded

at Gujranwala, the full blast of a bomb falling upon him. Two police officers received injuries at Lyallpur, one of whom was wounded in the ear and came for treatment to the Mayo Hospital at Lahore. He was discharged as cured from the hospital but the trouble in his ear revived later and his wound became septic. He died of this.

We regretted these deaths which we never aimed at. We had in our deliberations overlooked the fact that there was always the chance of death, for a man could even die of shell-shock. The action had however produced some effect, which was evidenced in the cautious attitude of the police. The talk of the man-in-the-street told us that the bomb explosions were taken as an opportune step by a large section of the populace.

CHAPTER 5

THE PLANNED VERSUS UNPLANNED

PANDIT Inderpal rented another house in Krishan Nagar which belonged to Dhan Devi, a Congresswoman, who was our neighbour. The Gawal Mandi house was too congested and hardly suitable for the headquarters of a secret organisation. Yashpal had intimated to us his decision to settle in Lahore for several months in pursuance of a plan to rescue S. Bhagat Singh and his comrades who were being tried in the Central Jail. He began to live in the new house. The 19th June Action secured an important place for us in the hearts of the main-Party men.

Comrades Bhagwati Charan, Chandrashekhar Azad, Lekh Ram alias Jat, and many other members of the main Party visited the Krishan Nagar house from time to time as the preparations for the rescue action were afoot. Bhag Ram, Hans Raj, Inderpal and other members of our group met them there. Another house was rented by the Party at Bhawalpur road where a powerful bomb of a type much more dangerous than used by us was being prepared. The rescue action was to prove a big affair in which a larger force than hitherto employed by the Party was to take part.

The plan received a serious blow from the tragic death of comrade Bhagwati Charan in the jungle near Ravi, where he

had gone with other comrades to test the newly prepared bomb. The bomb had exploded in his hand.

A few days later the Bhawalpur road house shook with explosions that had been caused by the sudden bursting of several bombs in an almirah, without any apparent cause. All the Party members present there were by chance sitting outside in the compound. They had to quit the place as soon as they could and disperse to various places where they were to remain in hiding till they could safely meet together again. The attempt to save S. Bhagat Singh and others was deferred for the time being.

Meanwhile the Gawal Mandi house had continued to be a centre of our activities. The two young men from Kangra had obtained employment through the efforts of Pandit Inderpal and it was now thought advisable to economise by giving up that place. Pandit Rupchand shifted to the Krishan Nagar house, with the rest. Jahangiri Lal, a co-opted member of our group, also came to live here along with his two brothers. The eldest of them, L. Kundan Lal, brought his wife and son; Pandit Inderpal's wife was already there. The house was spacious and a big family of revolutionaries, including several non-members, even non-sympathisers, had occupied it. The place was still more than sufficient and we sublet a portion of the upper storey to a married couple. The Party members had no immediate plans before them though several new young men had joined us. We held our meetings in an inconspicuous way, often under the pretence of playing at cards, and avoided suspicions as far as was possible.

Hans Raj and I began further experiments in a room that was left at our disposal, and Prem Nath, a college student belonging to Lahore, who had become a member, assisted us in this work. But we had to postpone our efforts before they could result in the development of a new plan.

Mr. A. met me one day by chance, and straightaway inquired, "Where do you live?"

It was an awkward question, and unexpected. My surprise was evident. He however told me without waiting for my reply, that he had asked the question because he had something very important to tell me. When we had walked a few steps farther he told me that he was going to reveal a secret and was thereby taking a great risk upon himself, for the sake of his friendship for me. Always cautious in his presence, I wondered what was in his mind, and let him lead me to a safe place where nobody

could overhear us. He said, laying emphasis here and there on his words, "Look here. You are living in Krishan Nagar, in your Party house, a few hundred paces from the U.T.C. grounds . . . and . . ."

I wondered whether he knew some important Party secret or else could only name the place we were living in, but he did not keep me in suspense, and went on after a brief pause. "A purbia (man belonging to the U.P.) is living next door to you; I may inform you that he is a C.I.D. man, purposely sent there to watch you. A large number of men are working under his orders. They follow you wherever you go, and keep constant watch on your house. You may have noticed a building just in front of the U.T.C. grounds; that is the rear of the C.I.D. office. The C.I.D. men watch you daily sitting behind the curtains and the identity of all the men who frequent your house is known to them. Beware of your neighbour, who wears a dhoti and a short jacket. His wife and son, six or seven years old, also keep peeping into your house to obtain information."

Mr. A. was panting with excitement. I saw that he was really serious. I felt no doubt about his sincere desire to help me. He was confident of the truth of the information he had brought, and waited to see my reaction. Continuing he said, "I had gone to my relative's house yesterday and obtained this detailed knowledge about your affairs from the son of that relative. I am at your service if I can be of any help to you, but what a regrettable fact it is that you can't desist from treading the dangerous path which is surely leading you to ruin. You are wilful and won't be influenced by any reasonable argument on my part. Who knows what fate awaits you, but this much is certain: we will be away, away from each other, and there will be no meeting and talking together like friends—you appear to be taking very serious things lightly, and I cannot but warn you again and again. Are you not afraid? Do you wish me to obtain more information for you?"

I thanked him for his concern about my future and for the information he had brought. I tried to reassure him that his fears were groundless. "Nevertheless," I added more confidently, "a loyal and dutiful son of the motherland is amidst the mist of troubles day and night, and who knows when they may overwhelm him. I shall gladly face troubles rather than evade my duty towards my motherland for fear of arrest and imprisonment. I do not take so tragic a view of the future as your friendship for me prompts you to suggest. All forebodings about

the future are the product of present evil. I see nothing bad in my present which is full of satisfaction and happiness for me! "

" Well, good-bye," he said, disconsolately.

" Good-bye," I replied.

Two days before this meeting with Mr. A., Lala Kundan Lal, the elder brother of Jahangiri Lal, had caught a boy of not more than seven years peeping into our house through the cracks of the door. The lad turned pale with fright at being surprised. The wife of our neighbour had also aroused suspicions because of her over-inquisitiveness about the occupation of the male members of our house, and the wives of Pandit Inderpal and Lala Kundan Lal had even been asked by her if they had ever seen a bomb. Pandit Inderpal had an interview with the neighbour, which was by no means pleasant to the latter. The news brought by Mr. A. confirmed our suspicions about him and we had already taken necessary measures of precaution against a surprise raid by the police.

We now removed all the remaining suspicious objects from our house, including the bulky trunks containing scientific equipment. Our laboratory here was a large one in comparison to that of Gawal Mandi *baithak*. It was no easy matter to remove all these things in view of the day-and-night watch kept over us, but we succeeded somehow, by the device of a counter-watch efficiently organised by us.

Mr. A. met me again after a couple of days and said he had brought a very disquieting piece of news. " The police," he told me, " had somehow found out that you are removing your things to different places in the city. They are holding consultations about rounding up all your Party members. You conveyed a black suitcase to a house at Mohini Road and they followed you all the way. They are to raid that house too in addition to many others; the list of houses and men is being prepared. They have so far decided to arrest forty men and women. The exact time and date for these arrests is not fixed yet and I shall inform you about this later on."

Now this man Mr. A. was a mystery. I had long known from facts ascertained about him that he was an informer. He had not been, moreover, so fast a friend of mine as he professed to be. He was only a casual acquaintance before the Islamia College Theft Case took place and had no doubt played false to the fellow-students involved in it. He had on the other hand always tried to help me. The valuable information that he had given me lately was correct to a point, with not even a semblance of

falsehood about it.

Taking my hand in his, he looked sadly at me and cried, "Try to benefit from the knowledge that is so precious in this hour of peril for you!" I was deeply impressed by his expression of good-will and replied "I will."

After he went away I conveyed the information I had received to Pandit Inderpal and the rest of our comrades. We held a consultation about what should be done. Opinions on the subject differed. One view was that we should all abscond without further delay and I was one of those who subscribed to it. The other alternative for us was to remain where we were and court arrest. Pandit Inderpal advocated this second line of action. This difference of opinion was however formal, because we had no money to enable us to go where we would. The members not belonging to Lahore had already gone. We could do the same if we had money. No definite decision was arrived at when Yashpal dropped in and was informed of the whole situation.

"I can give you some money and also leave with you the addresses of a few persons who can provide you with shelter until the situation improves. It is most dangerous for you to stay here any longer," observed Yashpal.

Pandit Inderpal turned down this offer of help, saying that his suggestions were not practicable.

It must be recalled here that it was due to his differences with Yashpal that the Pandit had decided to form an independent group of his own. We had been helping in the activities organised by Yashpal, the provincial organiser of the main Party, because our cause and creed were one and because we felt it our duty to serve the interests of the revolutionary movement, but we had always kept the entity of our group separate. Pandit Inderpal was definitely of the opinion that our merging into the main Party was sure to slow down the process of our work. He was the energetic type of man who carries out his own programme rather than wait for another's orders tardily given and half-heartedly obeyed. He was particularly dissatisfied with the way Yashpal worked. Losing our identity as well as usefulness for the cause was the real reason for his refusal.

Yashpal did not insist. He only warned us of the danger that awaited us by not moving out of the house at once. He then left.

It was decided at last that Pandit Inderpal, Rupchand and Jahangiri Lal and his two brothers should remain to court arrest and the rest should abscond. Amrik Singh and I had left the Krishan Nagar house but we did not leave Lahore. The money

problem was to be solved and all of us had favoured the idea of committing a dacoity on a railway octroi post on the next day just before sunset, when there would be enough money in the cash box there. I had put forth the proposal with the idea that Pandit Inderpal would also agree to abscond if we had enough money. The dacoity would have been committed but for the meeting which took place between Mr. A. and myself.

Mr. A. gave the news that the police had trebled their guard around us as they had come to know that we were dispersing one by one. An emergency meeting was held in the C.I.D. office last night, and it was decided to arrest us early in the morning at about 3 o'clock on the 26th of August.

It was on the 23rd of August that I met Mr. A. To attempt a dacoity with the police shadowing us at every step was futile. Next day they followed us openly without any pretence at concealment. We even found it difficult to meet together under these circumstances. It was necessary for me to see Pandit Inderpal before absconding. I sent word to him to come to the Gurudutt Bhawan Library in the evening.

Pandit Inderpal arrived on a bicycle followed by Jahangiri Lal on a tricycle (he had lost his legs in a railway accident many years before) towards the appointed place, and they had stepped into the premises when I caught sight of several policemen in plain clothes alighting from their bicycles and taking their position along the main road. I was closely observing their movements from inside the library and wondering whether they would come in behind my comrades or not. They left their machines behind trees and began to saunter lazily around the place. Had they dared to enter we would have been forced to flee. Instead we held a meeting. It was to all appearance the last chance of coming together of friends who had staked their lives for the common cause of the country's freedom. We embraced one another and I remarked, "Perhaps there are only a few hours more . . ."

"It seems so," interjected Jahangiri Lal. I continued, ". . . after which there will remain no option to go anywhere. There is still a chance. Let us abscond together! See how they are prowling on the road, all ready to pounce upon us; see how tardy they look, because of their hidden hunger for getting at us!"

Pandit Inderpal raised his head from the library table, looked at me and smiled with lips that savoured of pain. All our plans were for offence but not for defence. Lack of money had settled

things for us definitely and finally. I was thinking of the Pandit's refusal to accept help from Yashpal. I knew the reasons for the former's dissatisfaction with the latter, but there was something fatalistic about our attitude, otherwise we could not have been so squeamish at such a critical period in our lives.

Suddenly the Pandit, waking from his reverie, exclaimed, "Look here! We can't stay any longer in this place. Let us go away before they come in."

We rose from our seats and he said to me, "Have no fears regarding us. We will stick to our decision. There is no other way open to us. We deliberately refused assistance from Yashpal. There was no use working under his instructions. We would have become dependent upon him without even having the satisfaction of working to our heart's content. We should stand on our own legs even when we take our cue from another. The point we should now come to is where you should go. I think Rawalpindi will be a safe place for you to spend two or three months, by which time the police will have finished with their investigation."

I suggested Jammu. I liked Bhag Ram's company and moreover it was easy for him to provide a shelter elsewhere if his place became unsafe. The Pandit objected on the grounds that Bhag Ram might have been followed because of his frequent visits to us in the last month or two. The Rawalpindi comrades were, on the other hand, under no suspicion by the police and could even help me to cross the frontier if occasion demanded. I said I had been only once to that city, and that too for not more than an hour, and did not know where our comrades lived.

There had been a steady influx of C.I.D. men in the vicinity in the meanwhile. They were whispering and talking in low tones and were moving closer towards us. They still seemed to be hesitating, one of the reasons being the slow but steady approach of the darkness of the night.

Pandit Inderpal hurriedly exclaimed, "Everybody there knows the name of Hari Ram Pahlwan. You can find him. Go! We should clear away from the place now!"

We could not even shake hands. Both of them went out without looking back. I slipped into the verandah of the library: that place was darker. I saw my comrades cross the Gurudutt Bhawan garden, but the C.I.D. men who were now inside the premises did not follow them. I moved farther into the darkness.

The C.I.D. men stepped inside and went straight into the library room. They stayed there for a while, and then getting

out took the road coming from the Ravi. I too left the place and went in the opposite direction towards the river.

I crossed the Ravi bridge in entire darkness and stopped for a few minutes to see if I were followed. There were very large trees on either side of the road, making the darkness around me denser. Even the road was not visible. I was heading towards Shahdara Railway Station and had to take to the railway line for fear of going astray. There was a long wide stretch of green grass as if it were a lifted wave that weaved a mysterious spell around me.

CHAPTER 6

THE "HANDS UP!" CEREMONY

I REACHED Shahdara Station and caught the train for Rawalpindi at about 11 o'clock. Arriving at Rawalpindi in the morning I went straight to Bazaar Talwara where I had been before, and making enquiries was informed that Hari Ram Pahlwan had gone to Murree. Another comrade, Saran Dass, had a shop in the Bazaar Talwara which I learnt had been given up by him. It was very strange, not being able to find anybody, but many hours' search proved of no avail to me. I felt I could do nothing but return to Lahore. I had not even the tonga fare, and reached the railway station on foot. I entrained for Lahore without a drink of water all day and was back in Lahore about twenty-four hours after the meeting in the library. It was the night of the 26th August. I had seen a newspaper in the train but had found no news of any arrests at Lahore. When I came out of the Railway Station, someone caught my shoulders from behind and asked, "Where are you going?" It was Mr. A. I was surprised at being found out by him and felt he had something up his sleeve. I had a presentiment that he was going to tell me the worst news yet. He was however still wanting to know where I was going and I told him that I had some piece of work at Lahori Gate.

He vehemently exclaimed, "Do not be so rash as to fall straight into the clutches of the police! Come along with me if you do not want to be a willing victim."

He was an enigma. I followed him with curiosity, with confidence and without fear of being betrayed. I knew he could wish the whole of our Party to go to hell but not me! This police informer had taken upon himself the self-imposed duty of warning me against danger. He kept watch over my movements and had always something important to say whenever he met me. He was overcourteous, rather overconscious in his dealings, and so was I. Circumstances had placed us in such a position that neither of us could be frank. We kept at a respectful distance, because there was nothing common between us, except a vast difference of outlook. One extreme faced the other and wonderful was the result. He felt he could never influence me, and became sympathetic. Knowing I could never win him over to my side, I became unsuspicious. Of course, his helpful attitude towards me made me grateful to him. At least a sound basis for good relations between each other did exist, and I being the benefited party, could not think lightly of it.

We skirted along the Circular Gardens and reached the Masti Gate, the quietest side of the city, when he told me that my comrades of the Krishan Nagar house, as well as many others, were arrested and searches of several houses were carried through. He warned me that the police were very active in their search for me and that I could not evade arrest by going out into the open. "Why do you take so much risk, walking on the main roads, in broad daylight?" he asked with added anxiety.

I told him I had to arrange for some money. He took out a five-rupee note from his pocket and handed it to me.

"Be more careful," he said, and went away after shaking hands with me.

Next morning S. Puran Singh, a friend and former class-fellow of mine, met me and insisted that I should take shelter in his house, which was situated in the neighbourhood of my home. I would rather have spent the day in a place farther away but he said he would close the doors and windows of his *baithak* and no one would know of my presence there. I accompanied him to his house and had food after my two days' fast. Immediately afterwards I went to sleep.

At about five o'clock Puran Singh's elder brother returned from his office and his wife told him that someone was staying in Puran's *baithak* with all the doors and windows closed. He at once rushed into the *baithak*, opened the windows and remarked without hiding his surprise at seeing me, "How could you sleep in such a heat! Let the air in." He knew me but he showed

no sign of recognition and went away.

I saw through the open windows that the police were patrolling the path leading to my house which was but a stone's throw from Puran Singh's *baithak*. I slipped out and went into the Khalsa High School which was closed in those days for the vacation. I had to remain in the school premises till nightfall as everybody around the place knew me. I walked and sat on my feet alternately to while away the time. The anxiety about the plight of my arrested comrades was continuously in my mind these days as they were going through the most difficult period of their revolutionary life. The investigation by the police, to my mind, was more of a revengeful nature against the revolutionaries, than for ascertaining the real facts of the case.

An hour later S. Puran Singh came and told me that my brother S. Amrik Singh had been arrested at Gawal Mandi. It was sad news. I had to be more cautious.

The sun had not yet set and I was sitting on my feet, thinking of how S. Amrik Singh who had left the city three days before happened to be still in Lahore, when a black snake crept away from between my legs, touching my *Shalwar*. It shook me out of my reverie and a nervous tremor ran through my body. I did not move till it had gone away; I thought of the ignoble, miserable death that it might have caused in comparison with what I might meet on the gallows for the sake of my country. The daylight was still lingering but I came out of the school compound at the back of the science room. I had read for years in these rooms and was now bidding good-bye to the memories connected with them. I halted for a moment in the playground and then passed from it towards Mohini Road. I went out into the open fields far, far away from the city.

On the morning of 28th of August, I sent for some of my friends (not connected with the Party), including Mr. A., in order to obtain some money as well as information regarding the activities of the police. S. Puran Singh came with food for me. The second to come was Rajindar Singh, a class-fellow and neighbour of mine. He knew my brothers and I had asked him to go to their shop and bring me some money. He told me that their shop was closed as they had gone to attend a marriage at Simla. The reason of his own inability to help me was the visit of a police party to their house who were inquiring about a certain trunk lying with him.

It has been mentioned before that some of the things removed from the Krishan Nagar house were transferred to a house at

Mohini Road. Rajindar Lal, an occupant of that house, had taken charge of a number of suspicious articles but he got afraid and passed them on without my knowledge to Rajindar Singh, our common friend. Rajindar Lal was arrested on the 26th of August and Rajindar Singh threw the articles left by him into a well. That was why the police were questioning him and his father and uncle.

My third friend Mr. A. too had come and was wistfully looking on while I talked with other friends. He was both a friend and an enemy, a more rational being than those present there. His enmity was dormant and his friendship awake, and he had always maintained this attitude towards me, the best that his contradictory nature permitted. I had called him today not to ask for any help but to make him feel that he was a real friend, now that we had nothing to fear from each other. I was leaving Lahore for an indefinite period and wanted to bid him farewell.

We sat down on the grass on the farther side of the dry river-bed. The day was one of the most oppressive of the season. The air was still, and even the grass and the stagnant water in the river-bed looked overpowered, while all of us sitting together looked uncomfortable though for different reasons.

"You are in a very serious mood, Mr. A.," I remarked.

He said with a sigh, "The question troubling my mind is whether you would ever meet me again."

"That was why I wanted to see you," I said. "I am leaving Lahore and won't be able to meet you, whether I succeed in evading arrest or not. It may be our last meeting."

He was visibly moved by my free and frank attitude towards him and said with a warmth of feeling, "I have made many fruitless efforts to turn your mind from dangerous activities but I now feel that the time has come to tell you that I could try my best and might be able to save you with the help of my relative in the C.I.D., if you promise not to take part in terrorist activities any more. Most of the members of your Party have been arrested; you could hardly accomplish anything by persisting alone against the heavy odds that are daily accumulating against you. You should come to a final decision, anyhow!"

There was enough of the policeman in him though he never played the part of that dignitary for me. The sincerity of his expression, however, made me take his words seriously and I replied after thanking him for the proffered help. "There is no going back for me, Mr. A., as the path before me is clear. My duty is my guide. I cannot possibly think on the lines

suggested by you. I never worked in the Party with the reservation that I should be saved one day. I am quite satisfied with what I have been able to do, and entertain no misgivings about my future. I ask you to be hopeful and discard all fears about me! "

My words sounded too foreign to his ears ; his complexion darkened, and he turned his eyes towards the ground. Tears came into his eyes, and he choked and sobbed. Neither I nor my friends had expected this outburst of feeling. I could not take so dark a view of things as he did because of the youthful feeling in me that I was yet free and might hope to remain so. I did not know that there were only a few hours left.

We parted with our hearts laden with emotion. I had informed S. Puran Singh that I would pass the night in Gurudutt Bhawan and would wait there for him before I left in the morning.

S. Rajindar Singh and Puran Singh were both arrested that night. I went into an empty room of Gurudutt Bhawan buildings, locked it from inside and went to sleep. It was hot and swarming with mosquitoes. The police had apparently got the scent that I was to spend the night there. They searched for me in verandahs, in the garden and everywhere but had no idea that I was inside a locked room. I left for the river-side early in the morning, and reaching the other side of the bridge, went to sleep under a tree as I felt very tired.

At about 10 o'clock I felt thirsty and went to a well nearby. A cyclist was in sight on the road at a distance of about two hundred paces from the well. His manner of looking and his movements aroused suspicion. I hid behind some trees and he rode away. Apart from the rest stood a mulberry tree all alone in a wide stretch of ground. A crow began to make a noise as I went under the tree. All of a sudden it rushed at me and I had to scare it away with my hand. I saw that it had its young in the nest on the tree.

A moment or two later, someone cried, "Sirdarji, wait a bit ; we have some job with you!" Turning my head, I saw two men striding towards me. I began to run across the fields through the standing maize crop. Many whistles rang through the air and there were scores of men coming from all sides, whereas there were only two to be seen an instant before. I was caught.

One of them twisted the collar of my shirt harder and harder till I began to suffocate ; another handcuffed me. I smiled at the man who was still pulling hard at my neck. I thought that

all was over and gave a smiling farewell to the green garden which I had seen countless times and was to see no more. I had lived here from my childhood and now had come the moment for parting, a sudden breaking asunder like the cutting of a living thing in two, an event of tremendous importance in my life irrespective of what the future might bring. The effect of a catastrophic change was in my blood; it made me warm, as though I were drunk. My smiles were like sparks from the anvil of fate; but the policemen got nervous. Unable to comprehend the meaning of my looking bright, they thought I was expecting intervention and help from my companions, and shouted, "Hold him tight. Maybe he is not alone! Search him thoroughly! He may have some deadly thing in his possession."

I did not look agitated. My heart was beating normally. Perhaps a defensive mechanism of my nervous system was at work in this extremely perilous situation for me and strangely enough my captors were comparatively in a state of commotion and were looking far from being normal. I instinctively smiled again.

They took me towards Mohini Road. Large fields of cauliflower lay near my path and their green looked black—the colour of mourning as it struck me! We reached the house of Pandit Iqbal Nath, an acquaintance of mine. The Pandit had willingly obliged the police by offering them the use of his house to organise my arrest. S. Partap Singh, D.S.P., was sitting there waiting for me. He ordered a Sub-Inspector to search me thoroughly and told the organised police parties to retire. He pointed to me a chair to sit upon. I asked for a glass of water, which was brought by a professor, a tenant in Pandit Iqbal Nath's house. It struck me as somewhat strange that I should be drinking water as a captive in the house and from the hands of a free man! Pandit Iqbal Nath also came in. The smile of recognition on his lips was typical of the callousness of an old and worldly wise man.

CHAPTER 7

MEET THE ADVERSARY

THEY drove me to Akbari Mandi Police Station, also called Durli Jatha Police Station. Dúrlī Jatha is the name of a

special branch of the C.I.D. dealing with cases of habitual criminals and reputed to be more skillful in exacting confessions and breaking the will of obdurate suspects, than the ordinary police.

Not a day-to-day diary describing the emotional details and bringing out in relief the momentary significance of bygone events is reproduced in these pages, but a fairly true account of the past experiences, most of which have lost their superfluous content for me. Now I can only look back on what I was more than fifteen years ago. I was in the hands of the police. The hatred against that body was in those days one of the necessary conditions of my existence. It burned like incense offered to the god of revolution. I have changed in this respect, almost become unrecognisable, from the being that I was. We do not sleep in time, but continue chewing our thoughts and ideas so as to awaken on a higher plane. I have been on the move throughout the period of my imprisonment though the prison is exclusively meant to curtail and restrict movement both in the mental as well as physical spheres. A political prisoner, however, thinks under all conditions and never allows his inner urge for progress to die out. I go back in retrospect to the former times, not in a spirit of hatred and revenge, but with a view to presenting reality as it was.

In the Akbari Mandi Police Station, they put fetters on my feet and fastened the chain to the foot of a *charpai*. The chain of my handcuffs was held by a police constable sitting beside me. I could move my hands together, I could also move my legs and lie down or go to sleep. For two days no responsible police officer came to interrogate me. I had learnt the art of taking food with cuffed hands and could employ other devices that were needed. There was no conscious suffering; only a physically restricted body lay uncomfortably in unhealthy surroundings. I was mentally preparing, gathering my resources, for the fight to come. The present was nothing in comparison with the future, I thought, and impatiently wished the state of suspense to end. "Why do not they begin beating me?" I asked myself again and again.

The police officers began to come now and then; they put a question or two to me in a casual way and went away. They were mostly occupied in interrogating other suspects—alleged thieves, dacoits, etc.—in their custody. On the fourth day of my arrest, I saw them beat a young and a middle-aged man. Their anger found expression in chanting dirty abuse and flogging the poor convicts. The suspects did not confess their guilt

and the policemen placed the hands of each of them beneath the feet of a *charpai* till the miserable beings rent the heavens with their cries. I looked at the constables sitting on the *charpais* of their victims. Their faces were so fearful that pity could have never dared stay there even a second. Who gave them the authority to inflict such barbarous punishment? Wherefrom did they come to possess the power to do so much evil, so much injustice? They never seemed to ask themselves such questions! I too would not injure the reason of their being so merciless, as I was expecting no mercy myself and wanted to raise no question of pity! The shrieks of the victims remained long in my ears. The suspects were entitled to a revenge, I felt. They were let off two days afterwards because they did not confess or perhaps because they had, in fact, nothing to confess.

This was not the only example of cruelty that the police officers set before me, with the idea, no doubt, of producing a psychological effect. It was indeed nothing much of an example, but a routine business that was carried out whenever some suspected person did not yield to their verbal threats and abuse. The drama of human misery and degradation with its beastly acts continued, with one man's punishment being the sequel to another's, and so on. I felt I had not been wrong in my judgment about the police administration.

A week had passed. A Sub-Inspector was now deputed to interrogate me. He said he would ask for nothing but the truth from me.

"I have seen two suspects, a young and a middle-aged man being mercilessly beaten without any truth on your side," was my resolute and challenging reply.

"We would be declared incompetent and dismissed from service in no time, if we did not know how to make the criminal people confess their crimes," he said by way of a joke, and patting me twice or thrice on the back, added, "but they were ill-bred, illiterate people of a low type. No one is going to treat you like that."

Looking more amiable than he was, and trying to be more friendly than he could be, he asked, "When did you join the Party?"

"I know nothing about any party. I am a student of Khalsa School," I replied.

"A student does not feel any necessity for putting decoy-bombs in six different places to kill the police; what grievance could he have to perpetrate such an injustice against us?"

He continued smiling affably for a minute or two after saying these words. He had confronted me with the truth and was observing its effect upon me. He then repeated his question.

I told him that I knew nothing about bomb-making.

He went on putting questions to me even when I persisted in being silent. He was trying to confuse me with bold assertions of truth and to tire me with repetitions. He left me alone after sunset.

The same tactics were repeated the next afternoon. He was quite angry before he left and hurled his first epithet at me, as a warning of what was coming to me the day after.

When he took his departure, the Havildar in charge of my guard sat beside me on the *charpai* and began to eulogise him. "This Sub-Inspector," he confided in me, "is the gentlest by nature, who has never beaten a single suspect with his own hands. He says his *Namaz* five times daily and neither speaks a falsehood nor takes a bribe. Don't you feel that he has taken kindly to you? Compare him with other officers you daily see here on duty and you will know him better. Beware lest you are transferred into the hands of another officer who will treat you cruelly. Your own folly and stubbornness may bring about such a misfortune, but I think you are intelligent enough to appreciate my point as well as my sympathy."

He stopped to let me have my meals and resumed when I had finished. He noted the fact that I was not impressed by his talk and started me on a conversation that had nothing to do with my political activities. He made me tell him about my school life, my childhood, my brothers, my late father's position in the village, and so on, until it was midnight and my eye-lids became heavy with sleep, but he would not let me sleep. I knew only then the game he was after. He remained there for about two hours more and then gave his charge to the two constables on guard over me. I was however able to snatch about half an hour's sleep in the morning when one of the constables awakened me in a hurry, saying, "Beware! The Sub-Inspector has come!"

He was in a genial mood by now, and praised me a little before making preposterous allegations against some of my comrades under arrest. He blackened their character, making attacks of a personal sort, and then spoke highly of my gentle habits, my youthful age, sincerity, and even the spirit of sacrifice. "How could you work side by side with people like them? An intelligent boy like you ought to have understood that they were

pushing you in the forefront of danger, sneaking back themselves in order to save their skin. Cunning rascals, they are, I say, and the sooner you understand their true character the better it would be for you." He went on in this strain for a long time and I saw that he had been greatly misinformed about the character of our Party members, because he could not even make plausible accusations against them. He too realised that his insinuations were wide of the mark, and changing his tactics as well as tone, observed, "There are one or two young men, no doubt, of a selfless, sacrificing nature, and I have nothing to say against them."

I had neither admitted my acquaintance with most of my comrades, nor shown any resentment at the attacks on their moral character, but he must have noted some changes in my facial expression because I was not so impressive as I ought to have been at the time. I said I was dead tired, as I was not allowed to sleep last night and requested him to permit me to rest for a while.

"But you were asleep when I came in," he remarked coldly, handling his moustaches.

"I had slept only for half an hour."

"Then you must have been very uneasy in your mind. Speak out the truth and you will have no sleeplessness," he replied, and resumed his interrogation, without giving me a chance to make any more complaints about their not letting me sleep.

His patience soon wore out and he began to abuse and slap me. I was a little more than seventeen and could hate with all the unreasonableness of my age. I refused to answer his questions even with a nod of my head. He changed his insulting attitude and employed milder means of persuasion. His visits became shorter and the intervals between them longer.

I was surprised to learn after a fortnight of my stay here that I was being transferred to Lahore Fort. The police constable who usually "forgot" to pull the chain of my handcuffs for an hour or a half in the night had given me this information. "The Sub-Inspector was only carrying on a preliminary investigation; the real test will take place in the Fort," he had said, not by way of a threat but as a friendly hint. The Havildar, taking a more professional view of the thing, said, "I had already told you to give up your obstinate attitude. Now suffer the consequences, you unfortunate young man!"

Jawahar Lal, Inspector-in-Charge of Durla Jatha, who had taken no part in questioning me, was also not pleased with me

and said, "There would have been no need to send you to the Fort, had you been fair with us. Now go where there is no civilisation, no British rule; where Moghul times still persist! Remember my words; I am a Hindu Officer and could not treat you badly. The Mohammedans there will have no such consideration."

His father too was an Inspector of Police. Himself a fat-bellied man of medium height with the cast of a bully, he was overproud of his talents. I had seen enough of him to understand that he was bombastic like thunder and imposing like threatening dark clouds that do not rain. The fate of suspects depended upon his whims. He had the power to send persons to trial on the slightest suspicion, or to release full-fledged criminals if he chose. He was evidently sorry he was not given a chance to employ his talents in extorting a confession from me and was jealous of the Mohammedan Officers who might get promotions if they succeeded in making out a big case against myself and other arrested comrades.

On the evening of the 13th September, at about dusk a prisoners' van arrived to take me to the Fort. A group of seminaked children playing outside the Akbari Mandi Police Station began to shout in chorus "Thief! O Thief!" as I entered the van. Even the older people could have taken me for a thief because I had neither bathed nor changed my clothes for the past fifteen days, and sleeplessness had added to the doubtfulness of my appearance. The van sped like an arrow in its path, seeing nothing, feeling and hearing nothing, and reached the gate of the Fort whence it began to ascend slowly to the C.I.D. Offices situated higher up. Young men with the gloomiest prospects before them were confined in a dark part of this place associated with the names of glorious Mohammedan and Sikh princes of our recent history.

CHAPTER 8

THE BATS CLING TO THE ROOF

I WAS taken to a cell. An overwhelming force of mosquitoes greeted me as I stepped inside. They were happy, it seemed, to find me plump and healthy!

In the morning I was made to appear before S. Partap Singh, D.S.P., who was the head of the police parties which had gone to arrest me. I had had a full night's rest in spite of the mosquitoes and was feeling refreshed and clear in my mind, and fit to suffer the process of police "investigation," the meaning of which was slowly becoming clear to me.

S. Partap Singh bade me take my seat and moved his chair nearer. He looked like an unlettered Jat, educated by the experiences of life, which had given him the proverbial shrewdness of that class. One could not, on the first impression, suspect him of possessing the calculating mind of a Jew. He was a much deeper personality than Jawahar Lal of the Durli Jatha, who looked a bully.

He enquired nothing, only told things, making a show of complete knowledge, without the necessity to obtain information about the case from me. Nevertheless, being a Sikh, he naturally desired to help a young fellow-religionist of his. He was, however, willing to give me the credit for revealing important secrets if I only went on nodding in affirmation at his questions. I was required to do no more than point out that he was speaking something untrue when such was the case.

His self-confidence was amazing, his words had an air of certainty; he had explained himself in a simple, plain and matter-of-fact way. What a great D.S.P. he was with the face of a hardy villager!

I smiled a little and said, "The patience of police officers is soon exhausted, and they automatically resort to the use of force and abusive language when they find that their intelligence is of no avail. The Sub-Inspector in Akbari Mandi had come out in his true colours on the third day of his interrogation. I can say nothing about you, but I had had a gratuitous experience of your methods at the cost of non-political suspects there. You will perhaps pursue a method apparently but not essentially different from that of the Inspector-in-Charge of Durli Jatha. He thunders with a lightning flash and you might try to put cold water into my veins. He has let me go after a fortnight, but you will persist in persecuting me till I collapse. Go on, since I must remain a victim of your unending suspicions and accusations and since there is no alternative for me but to go through the ordeal."

In fact he and Jawahar Lal seemed to me to be the arms of a single mechanical being, one of which was pressing me to the ground and the other showing a closed fist. S. Partap Singh,

too deep to be fathomed, was not a bit offended and smilingly remarked, "You are suspicious, because I am a police officer. You look red-hot; but I know that hot things by themselves cool down with time. Heat is a false stimulant that blows raw minds like yours towards unreal heights and ought not to be applied to personal life-and-death problems."

He then told me that several of my co-accused had given statements and that the full story of our "crimes" was out.

"Do you know Inderpal?" he asked.

"No!" I replied.

"Are you against the British Raj?"

"No!" was my seemingly innocent reply.

"I have purposely asked these questions to elicit these noes from you, in order to make you realise how childish you are in the face of very serious charges that will be proved against you in the court."

He then began to describe briefly the activities of our Party, mentioned many names, and related several important events without however telling the particular parts played by individual members. He looked again and again at me to observe my reactions. I could neither deny nor admit anything and was trying my best to appear unaffected at his disclosures.

Summing up the case against me, he remarked, "You and your brother Amrik Singh will get capital punishment for two murders in the conspiracy, and should realise after what I have told you that some of your associates have completely betrayed you." What do you say about that? Won't you try to save yourself as they are doing? Have I not told you the exact position as it is?"

He stopped to hear what I had to say about these things. Seeing me still silent, he touched my shoulders and exclaimed:

"Do not dream. Face reality as it lies revealed before you!"

He had risen from his seat in expectation of an answer, and when I did not give any, calmly asked me to think over these things at my leisure in the cell at night. "If you need my help, tell me frankly, and I shall come to your assistance even though I am literally encircled here by Mohammedan staff who are not on good terms with me!" he said, and ordered the sentry standing outside to take me back to the lock-up.

He had indeed given me much to think over. Many secrets were out. Who revealed them I could not imagine. I had full faith in the comrades with whom I had worked, but the majority of the arrested persons, numbering about forty, were unknown

to me and I could not rightly guess about the huge conspiracy that was alleged against so many people. I felt no doubt about some plot being hatched against us, with the complicity of some pseudo-revolutionaries. The simultaneous bomb-outrages in six different places were the main action of our Party, in which not more than half a dozen persons had taken part. I knew that Yashpal, Pandit Chandrashekhar Azad, and other members of the main Party were still at large. Whence came these forty men? What had they done? How many were playing into the hands of the police? These questions occurred over and over again to me, but I found no answer. It was not surprising that under the circumstances S. Partap Singh told me about capital punishment. It was a possibility, no doubt, but was he not painting an exaggerated picture, from motives of his own? It was ridiculous to think of being "saved" through his help, when so much falsehood was being piled up against us! The atmosphere was highly intriguing. I had been sent late into the Fort. I was in the dark about what had happened to those who were brought there earlier. I also wanted to find out the names, if nothing else, of those confined there. The constables on duty talked little of things in which I was interested, but none except them could tell me anything. I was gradually getting information, gaining some knowledge. One of us, Dharam Vir of Lyallpur, had gone through the severest ordeal, I was informed.

I looked out of my cell as far as I could see, with my hands on the bars. For a long while I followed the movements of the police constable in plain clothes, who was bringing meals, one by one, for the arrested persons, and knew some of the places where they were confined. Suddenly I heard the voice of S. Amrik Singh quarrelling over the bad quality of the food given to him. When the man brought my food I too complained loudly, giving expression to my discontent.

My cell was damp, there being no outlet for water used by me for bathing, etc., and the mosquitoes here were wondrous fat. It was, I imagined, perhaps due to the fact that they were descendants of those who had sucked the blood of great warriors of bygone days. The little blood-suckers were not afraid of human beings. I was not permitted to switch off the electric light in the cell. I dragged my bed nearer the bars of the door, and lay down looking outside. A talkative constable was on duty and I whiled away my time in idle gossip with him. I slept very late.

The D.S.P. called me again to his office next day. He told me that my brother had confessed his guilt, and advised me to do the same. "I shall try to save both of you in face of all opposition that the Mohammedan D.S.P.'s may offer in this connection," he declared, and added, "I hope I shall with the grace of the Guru succeed in diminishing considerably the weight of the serious charges against you, if you only speak out the truth, which is already known to me, and thus strengthen my hands."

I asked him to tell me what S. Amrik Singh had confessed.

"I cannot disclose police secrets to you, but I can give the substance of what information I have obtained. Is it not a fact that both of you brothers went to Gujranwala and managed the bomb-explosion there that resulted in the death of a police officer?" asked he, laying stress on every syllable and looking straight into my eyes.

I gave no reply and he impatiently cried:

"Do not try in vain to look like a hardened criminal, as there is an undesirable uneasiness of expression on your face showing clearly that you understand how matters stand. Come out with the truth, I say!"

"The truth is that you are making a death case out of nothing against both of us as well as others; you are asking me to believe impossible things about my brother, so I would request you to let me see him if there is an iota of truth in what you have just said about him," I demanded, feeling very hurt.

The D.S.P. was taken aback at this sudden and unexpected outburst of feeling on my part. "It is not in my power to let you meet," he said calmly.

"Bring me a statement signed by him or even a chit in his handwriting and I shall know that you are telling me the truth."

"We do not take the signatures of accused persons confessing their guilt, but I can assure you in other ways that all the arrested persons have given their full statements and nothing remains hidden from us now," he replied with evident displeasure at my critical attitude.

He then gave me the startling news that Pandit Inderpal, Saran Das, Shiv Ram, and Khairati Ram were going to be made approvers in the case along with one or two others. "The full burden of the case will fall on your brother!" he warned.

This was the most powerful weapon in his armoury and he used it slowly and deliberately. He ridiculed my studied composure and told me again and again that I was taking undue

advantage of his leniency.

"Do you know what would have happened to you had you been under the charge of a Mohammedan D.S.P.?" he asked.

"Your question hints about what is going to happen to me," I observed.

"You are a fool," he said, "to think so; what need have we to compel you to tell what is already known to us beyond even the shadow of a doubt? I have protected you so far and shall continue to do so, but a hard fate awaits you if you do not realise the treacherous role your friends have played against you. I shall give you further proofs of their treachery and you should then calmly decide what is the most advisable step for you to take. Save yourself and your brother from the gallows. I am ready to give you all help I can. A statement from you is the only course left for you."

He then gave orders to the sentry to take me back to my cell.

I gathered from my talk with the sentries on duty that I as well as a few other comrades were not brought earlier into the Fort because arrangements for our accommodation were not complete and a new staff was yet to be called. The information clearly exposed the hypocrisy of the D.S.P.'s claim to have protected me from the methods of torture that might have been employed by the Mohammedan officers for extorting a confession. I learnt also that the accused who arrived earlier were greater sufferers than those who came later. This proved without doubt that the police had succeeded in obtaining some incriminating statements. I could not believe this in the case of Pandit Inderpal but was doubtful about others whose names were mentioned by S. Partap Singh, because I did not know them. We were not allowed to see one another when we were taken to or brought from the offices in the day. I had within a few days learnt of the presence of several comrades in different cells.

The Fort was nothing more than the Akbari Mandi Police Station on a larger scale except for its awe-inspiring buildings and the labyrinthine ways leading to them. The police had been using the same methods as were used there. There were only about a dozen lock-ups in all, in the Fort, and persons considered more dangerous were confined in them. The rest usually remained fastened to *charpais* placed in dark dirty corners or improvised investigation rooms, or farther away in the dark, dingy *Hathi-Khana* of old times now swarming with bats. Here and there a human animal lay crouching hands and feet bound, on a *charpai* beside a pillar of this *Hathi-Khana*. The place

had, however, an advantage denied to those confined elsewhere. One could whisper and even have a chance of talking to another in a cautious manner.

One day a Mohammedan Inspector of Police came to my cell along with a Havildar and began to question me about the cost, etc., in the manufacture of coins. I did not reply and in addition to filthy abuse was given a severe beating. He continued this method of investigation for two days more and then gave me up. Some other officers also came to question me on different occasions but they did nothing beyond showing their exceeding contempt for me.

S. Partap Singh had not called me for a couple of days, and I was a bit surprised when a Havildar came to take me to his office one morning. He had always something terrible to tell me and I wondered what new thing I would learn that day. He was busy and told the Havildar to wait outside for some minutes. The latter took me aside from the main entrance to the office and seated me beneath a window in a back wall of the place from where I could overhear a part of the conversation that the D.S.P. was having with a Hindu Inspector of Police.

My ears caught the words "mountainous Brahmin" . . . then the full sentence "he is unreliable" . . . then the phrase "not more than twelve" . . . and lastly "all else should be made witnesses under 164. . . ." It was S. Partap Singh speaking. The other officer's voice could not be heard at all. They were talking in English and the Havildar could not understand anything about it. He himself was busy conversing in low tones with the constable on duty. I was called in about fifteen minutes later.

The D.S.P. was there alone. He greeted me with a questioning smile. "Your friend Inderpal has accepted the King's pardon along with four others. What do you say about it?"

The news was in the air. I had heard it from the lips of the constable on duty before my cell and from other sources too, but I showed that I did not believe it.

The D.S.P. said with emphasis, "He is to get the King's pardon tomorrow. There is yet a chance for you. I can do for you what Syed Ahmad Shah (the D.S.P. in whose charge Inderpal was) is doing for the mountainous Brahmin. He will not succeed, whereas I will if you but say the word. Give me your full statement today and you will see that your own and Amrik Singh's life are saved. I assure you that Amrik Singh will not even be prosecuted. I feel I am offering you a fair

deal. -- It is not as a police officer but as a real well-wisher of both that I make this offer. Think over it calmly but quickly because the time is short."

Now I could make out from the bits of talk overheard a few minutes before that he was not in favour of the King's pardon being granted to Pandit Inderpal. This was an encouraging piece of news which gladdened my heart. I refused to be persuaded by the D.S.P. and he had to send me back.

Back in my cell, I thought over the conversation I had overheard and tried to make out the head and the tail of it. S. Partap Singh, I inferred, did not think that Pandit Inderpal was reliable as an approver. He wanted to put up only twelve accused for trial in a court and was in favour of setting the rest free on condition of their giving evidence under Section 164. He would have given short shrift to the main conspirators, if he had had his way. Half a dozen sentences and about the same number of life sentences; that was his plan for our case. Syed Ahmad Shah, D.S.P., on the other hand was embarking upon a much more ambitious programme of starting a big conspiracy case which was to redound to his credit as a master mind in the Criminal department. His policy prevailed.

The approvers had given their statements to the magistrates and now the police officers were feverishly busy preparing witnesses for the court. The result was an all-round slackening of the game of threats, abuse and beatings that had been going on since our arrest. Their sole concern now was to bring in witnesses into the Fort and show us to them again and again lest they fail to identify us in the court. We were given facilities for interviews with our relatives in the presence and hearing of police officers. One or two lawyers were also allowed to see some of us. Our complaints about bad food, disallowance of shaving and toilet facilities, etc., were listened to with a show of sympathy. This unexpected change was meant as an inducement for us to remain longer in their custody.

Some magistrates, sure tools in the hands of the police, had been so far giving remands in our absence, not feeling any need for personal appearance of the accused; others had come to our respective places of confinement but not revealed their identity to us nor did they even tell us that they were giving a remand. A great disadvantage to most of us raw youths hardly out of our teens was our ignorance of legal procedure. The meaning of the word remand, and the lawful method of holding identification parades were understood very late by the majority of

us. The barbarous treatment by the police and the corresponding capacity to suffer had been the two main ideas engrossing our minds since our arrest. We only learnt after a long and hard experience that there was no easily explained direct relationship between us and the police who had several insidious weapons at their command.

One of us, S. Harnam Singh of Sheikhpura, whose father and other near relatives were in police service, was conversant with the tricks of the trade and went on hunger-strike after a few days of his arrest, demanding to be sent to the judicial lock-up. Later on, some others too insisted on and succeeded in being sent to jail. Those who had already had interviews with their legal advisers raised objections to further remands being given to the police. The latter, however, secured a good many of us for fifteen days more. A fortnight later, the magistrates at last seemed to have fully recovered their lost sense of legal propriety and listened to our objections that there was no need for further remands.

The police had meanwhile accomplished the task of ensuring our conviction by daily showing us to the prosecution witnesses, and coaching them in the statements they were required to give in the court.

On the day of our departure from the Fort, Munni, the sweeper, burst out in loud protests against the attitude of the big officers, to the amusement of the rank and file, the police constables, who had gathered in the compound near the *Hathi-Khana*. He threw down his latrine-broom, braced up his arms, and cried with all the weariness of the past two months' hard toil centred upon his brow, "What should Munni the unfortunate do? Die? I had worked so hard when S. Bhagat Singh and his companions were here. The same has been my lot since these people who are now going away arrived. The 'Chhota Sahibs' would become 'Burra Sahibs,' the Inspectors, Deputies, the Head Constables would become Sub-Inspectors; others would obtain *Chittis* (commendatory letters), but what would poor Munni get? What should I do? They of the Bhagat Singh case have been hanged but I got nothing. These people would also be hanged and I will still get nothing! What should poor Munni do? Die?" It was a great delight for some of us to see one another after a long spell of mental and physical suffering under police custody. Our ordeal was at an end. A lorry was standing by to take us to the jail. The comrades who had coins in their pockets gave a few to Munni, the sweeper, who had grown calm

at the arrival of a Sub-Inspector. The poor man had spoken truth without disguise though his shouts were in vain. His protests had been more to the air which assimilated the outpourings of his heart, than to the officers of the Fort. The ridiculous side of poverty had amused the constables; they would have been more amused and perhaps more sympathetic if the sweeper had been similarly outspoken before the officers. The latter had never ceased to profess their sympathy for us even while they were administering us blows, even when they were making us safe for the gallows with all the fair and unfair means at their command; but the unsophisticated talk of Munni was a rare phenomenon in that treacherous place, the Lahore Fort, where neither the officers nor the accused persons in their custody were in a position to be wholly truthful and frank.

The memory of an elderly figure of medium size, with a henna-coloured, elegant beard, comes back to me whenever I go back to the days spent in the Fort. He would come with a gentle gait, tarry for a while before one of us in a cell or elsewhere, and utter, with a sweet, smiling expression on his face, remarks such as: "What a noble youth this one seems to be!" or "Who has the heart to touch these petals of youth roughly!" or "I feel sorry you have been beaten by so and so; I shall tell him to do that no more while I am here!" He was the retired Deputy Superintendent, Niaz Ahmad Shah, an experienced old hand, temporarily recalled into service for the purposes of our case. He never took any direct part in the investigation, such as questioning any of the accused. His sole business was to sit in his office scanning and reviewing files, evidential documents, statements of the approvers, etc., in order to find out apparent flaws and probable defects in the prosecution story and give it the air of perfection before it went to the court. His was the vision of an architect, a great builder, and the material for a reinforced concrete building was provided him to work upon. He was, without any ill-will, labouring cheerfully at constructing a permanent cage for us.

The third D.S.P., Syed Ahmad Shah, was in charge of the investigation as a whole. He had himself questioned several accused but not me, though his subordinates did on several occasions try their hand at making me "speak." They even employed force and abusive language. I came to know that Shah Sahib blamed S. Partap Singh for his inability to break my will because he had not employed the third degree methods necessary for obtaining such a result.

CHAPTER 9

THE JOY OF BEING TOGETHER AGAIN

WE entered the gates of the prison. I had no idea of what the inside of a prison might contain except some hazy notions of chains and fetters and narrow subterranean dwellings. A jail officer entered our names, occupations, etc., in his register and sent us inside one by one. A jail warder and two convict Lambardars led me towards the cells, a long way off from the main gate. I was too calm and cautious, like the man who is prepared for all eventualities but does not know what each step further might reveal. I would have instinctively hit back if one of the men accompanying me had by chance touched me with his hand; but not cared at all if he had announced his intention of beating me and then begun doing so.

Some of the comrades had gone ahead, some were coming behind. We were placed in different rows of cells, three or four here, three or four there, with the view of keeping every batch isolated. We felt it was only a temporary arrangement and hoped to be put together in an association barrack when the case against us began in the court. The new-comers could not see the comrades who had arrived some days before. Each of us was locked in a separate cell, without food, bedding and light. I stood for a while in the dark and was then able to discern a raised place on one side which was the mud-berth meant for sleeping. I groped with my hands and found a small earthen pitcher full of water. I felt about further in the cell and found nothing else. Lying down on the floor I soon fell asleep. The prison was, after all, not a series of underground holes but only a place of inconvenience, rather of convenience in comparison with the Lahore Fort, and my mind was at rest.

We were let out of our cells in the morning for an hour, to go to the latrine, to bathe at the tap, to take our food and to talk together provided we kept to our respective rows. Pandit Rupchand, Jahangiri Lal, L. Kundan Lal, Jai Parkash and I were happy at our reunion and talked about our experiences after we were arrested. I looked again and again at the prisoners taking their meals in a file in the barrack opposite our cells. A

few of them came nearer and had a chat with us. I looked at the iron cups in their hands and their dress consisting of shabby striped half-shirts and half-pyjamas, and felt it was a wretched, sub-human, beggarly life they led in the prison. The diet and the dress of a free man, meagre and poor though they might be, have no fixed, slavish pattern to conform to, but the prisoners are a branded caste with their cheerless, depressing uniformity. Those standing near us had an ominous look about them. Here was humanity sans freedom, an inferior creation of the punitive law, which enforced a shady existence upon good and bad and noble and mean alike. The prisoners were afraid of the warder and the convict Lambardars on duty over us and did not stay for more than a few minutes. According to the jail rules they could not have come out of their barrack to have an idle talk with us. The warder on duty asked us to take our meals and locked us inside the cells before the Assistant Superintendent-in-Charge came on his round. He informed us that we were acting against the instructions of the jail authorities by moving about freely outside our cells just like people outside the jail. We took our regulation diet in just a free way and thus obviously infringed several more jail rules before going inside our cells.

A prisoner does not require much time to be familiar with the pattern of jail life, as it is the same throughout days, months, years, seeming to bear no change. The jail manual—"Jail-Man" in the jargon of the prisoners—the antiquated code of laws for the prisons, prescribes in detail for the conduct of the prisoners as well as the administrators of the prisons, and is full of impracticable, nay impossible, restrictions on the liberty of the former, though it leaves much to the discretion of the latter. The laws forbid the prisoner to talk loudly, to sing, to laugh loudly, to leave his place unless told, and lays down the limit to his dress, diet, sleep, speech, work, movements, in short every phase of his life. It virtually amounts to the control of his appearance, his thoughts, the natural expression of his desires and needs. Breaking of many of the jail laws, rules and regulations is inherent in the situation. It is a necessary condition of living for the prisoners, and the realisation of it constituted our first impression of jail life.

The under-trial prisoners have the right to wear their own clothes and obtain their own food from outside if they can avail themselves of it. They are, so to say, in a transition stage from freedom to slavery but jail discipline meant for the prisoners applies to them as well. A stricter watch and ward was enforced

upon us because we belonged to the "most dangerous" category of terrorists.

Back in my cell, I found my sweater and knickers missing. A search for these was carried out by the warder and the convict Lambardar on duty but, as the latter remarked jocularly, "there is no *thana* (police-station) here to report to" and nothing could be gained by lodging a complaint with the higher officers.

"Who could have possibly stolen the things?" I enquired from the Lambardar.

"Some prisoner, of course," he replied. "What was the use when he wouldn't be able to wear them himself?" I asked, getting more interested in the matter. The Lambardar smiled at my ignorance and replied with a wink at the warder standing outside: "He would sell them to a jail employee for a few cigarettes or a bit of opium or something like that and that is the sole consideration behind the theft."

He then told me how the trade of smuggling was carried on by the jail warders, in spite of the strictest rules to the contrary, and even at the risk of dismissal from service involved in it. A warder who got only seventeen rupees per month and had four and five children besides his wife or parents to look after was perforce obliged to supplement his earning by such questionable methods. The prisoners, he told me, were in a comparatively more miserable plight, deprived as they were of all enjoyable things available to those outside jails, and that was why they could not do without smuggling.

"It was a fight against oppression, against inhuman conditions," I thought, when the Lambardar had gone out. No morals could be drawn, however, from the expedients resorted to under conditions of sheer necessity and abject helplessness.

Smuggling was only expressive of the struggle for existence and not for better or higher existence.

Prisons are hotbeds of crime, a safe retreat from the civilising influence of society. They are of the nature of a cesspool for collecting filth to the exclusion of anything of any value, thus providing a feeling of security and health to the society at large, which however, does not concern itself with the diseases, the microbes, the vermin and the poisonous creatures that swarm in these wretched dens of misery and degradation. The opening and shutting of the iron doors of the prison seems to fan cooling air in its perspiring face, and it feels that holding a balance between the influx and outflux of criminals is all that is required for keeping crime under control.

And who is a criminal? Someone who has no regard for the love, or the property, or even the ideas of another; someone emotionally unhinged, no doubt. Crude desires demand crude satisfaction, and the man, without finer susceptibilities finds himself one day under lock and key. There is an exclusive society of criminals, and the equally harsh treatment meted out to all alike makes him feel himself placed in congenial surroundings.

The iron doors of a prisoner's cell are opened early in the morning and when the place is cleansed he is handed two big, thin *chapatis* and something to eat them with. This done, the locks close their jaws again and the mud walls staring at him through the iron bars darken the vision of the unfortunate man, shutting out from his view, the horizon beyond. Many a prisoner in his misery and helplessness at first cries with a sigh: "Alas! I have been brought to such a pass!"

It is a very dark and dreary life indeed for one who has really known nothing about crime. But crime, the real thing, has an energizing motive power behind it, and has never, never lacked in resourcefulness. The old criminal cheers up the new, saying, "Put up a bold face, my friend, and laugh and smile, since no hardship, no solitary confinement, no lock-and-key system of terrorization can cheat us of cheating, bully us out of bullying or trick us out of our trickery! Use your talents to your best advantage and all will be well. You can malingering, abuse, whine, whimper, or wag your tail or bribe to the accompaniment of flattery. Don't you know that you are even capable in your awful wretchedness, of secreting a deadly venom, the weapon of offence of the lowliest of the lowly?"

The greatest problem before a prisoner is not to reform himself but to cheat the laws that are meant to crush him out of shape, out of existence. His sole aim, in short, is to live out the period of his imprisonment. That is why he has recourse to smuggling, even intoxicating drugs, etc. The laws are brutal. They cannot even suppress crime, though they mean to supplant it. There can be no civilization—but only barbarity—under lock and key. The same system of suppression, threats, illegal beatings and legal punishments is in vogue here, as I had seen while in police custody. The sole occupation of a prisoner is trying to evade rules and restrictions, and avoid punishment.

Many prisoners had continued to meet and talk with us. Enter the gates as a prisoner and you become one of them! I saw no criminals in the plan but men like you and me looking as anybody would look like under the same conditions and with the given

dress and in the prescribed attitude. It was simply the problem of poverty, of repression, of misrule, narrowed down to small dimensions, that one faced in the prison.

I had become one of these prisoners, a recipient of their sad heritage. I was dropped in as a contradiction, as an anomaly, an unwanted thing, and the appellation of "terrorist" added to my name made the jail authorities take me as one. Ours was a "special case," requiring special attention by the officers. They had strictly forbidden us to mix with the ordinary criminals.

The prison rose before my eyes like a gigantic obstacle, a formidable citadel of counter-revolution, a giant machine to crush our spirit, and squeeze us dry of the blood which had been charged with revolutionary fervour. Its environments began to infiltrate into my veins like a mean, vulgar, intoxicating drug and made me stand on the offensive. Its object was to mould us into an inoffensive pattern . . . we were ready to be put to the test.

We demanded to be put together. I had been able to see several more of my friends confined in other rows of cells. Only three days and three nights had passed and we already knew that obtaining *chapatis* not half-baked, verminless cooked vegetables, water, air and sun, and the light of a seemingly blind hurricane lamp at night meant struggling for them. In fact there were no rights for a prisoner . . . unless he could fight for them. We went to the tap and a convict officer accompanied us. We put our heads out of our cells and had to contend with the warder. We were followed to the latrine, pursued to the bathing place, and harassed when we tried to talk with anyone in the jail, even a co-accused in the case. We felt this humiliating treatment ought to stop.

The first impression a political prisoner seems to make on the jail authorities is that he is a great nuisance to them and that they might have nothing to bother about if they could keep him under lock and key in his cell for twenty-four hours on end, day in and day out, until the moment of his release. Once out of his cell, once any latitude is allowed to him, there may arise many a problem in regard to jail discipline. So the officers seem to think. Latitude breeds latitude, freedom breeds freedom, but complete prostration paralyses, sheer ignorance can find no argument, and total helplessness can raise no cry. The ideal atmosphere that the officers always long for is peace without problems. They have the powers to enforce it.

The most persistent demand our case-fellows were making

the authorities was for putting us together in an association-barrack. The comrades who were not taken to the Fort during the police investigation had also arrived in the jail. Our trying to meet one another in spite of the instructions to the contrary had created an atmosphere of tension. We resisted the unnecessary and irksome restrictions imposed upon us and the attitude of the authorities became stiffer. One of us, Malik Kundan Lal of Lyallpur, retaliated when a convict officer ill-treated him. The situation was growing serious.

The Superintendent came to see us. It was my fifth day in the prison. He called all of us together in his presence and harangued us thus: "Young men! You are revolutionaries no longer, but prisoners bound to obey rules. You must know that the prison is a little kingdom and the Superintendent here has more powers than any absolute king can have. I can't stand indiscipline amongst you. Behave properly and you shall have facilities."

He looked at us with a benevolent smile upon his face. The man of authority was in a conciliatory mood. He made no mention of any alleged misbehaviour on our part and asked us to be like law-abiding citizens enjoying the rights of citizenship.

Our spokesmen requested him to put us all together. He agreed and we were taken to a barrack the same evening.

CHAPTER 10

IT LOOKED LIKE A FESTIVAL

WE were twenty-six in all. Dharam Vir, a jolly young comrade from Lyallpur, had been the first to be arrested in connection with our case. There was his opposite in character, Malik Kundan Lal, the fiery, impetuous, energetic youth who had been arrested for complicity in the Lyallpur bomb-outrage. Malik Nathu Ram, a veteran Congress worker of Rawalpindi, was there along with Krishan Lal, Krishan Gopal, Hari Ram Pahlwan, Baba Gurbux Singh, Harnam Singh, Sirdar Singh, Bansil Lal, Maharaj Krishan, Sewa Ram and Bishan Das from the same city. None of these Rawalpindi comrades except Hari Ram Pahlwan and Krishan Gopal had been in the Fort. There were

the three comrades Harnam Singh, Bhim Sen and Gokul Chand hailing from Sheikhupura, one of the six places where bomb-explosions had occurred. The meeting with my old friend Bhag Ram, who had been arrested at Jammu about a fortnight before, was a pleasant surprise. He was kept in the Fort, but I did not even know of his presence there. The police had brought him only a few hours before into the jail. My brother Sirdar Amrik Singh about whom I had heard several stories of defiance and courage before the police was here to tell his experiences. Dharam Pal, younger brother of Yashpal, was arrested and sent to the jail to add to our society on no other plausible ground than that he was the brother of a revolutionary. Bansi Lal of Lyallpur was another addition. Pandit Rupchand, Jahangiri Lal, L. Kundan Lal, Jai Parkash and Dianat Rai who were arrested at Lahore had come with us from the Fort and we had the opportunity to recount one another's experiences under police custody. The majority of the rest were friends whom I had seen in the jail. It was pleasant beyond measure to be huddled together in the same barrack, the floor of which was strewn all over with bedding and luggage. We had given up all reserve in the mad joy of coming together and flitted from seat to seat, the bed-clothes trailing along behind us.

In our preoccupation we had not taken notice of a separate batch of under-trial prisoners occupying a corner of the same barrack. They were arrested in connection with what was known as the Zira Bomb Case and were to be tried by the same Special Tribunal which was constituted for the purpose of our case. We made amends for the seeming neglect by paying added attention to these comrades.

The feeble light of the single incandescent lamp over our heads could not draw our attention to the fact that the night had come. We only remembered at about eleven o'clock that we had not yet had our food. We talked while we ate. The joy of our hearts gushed forth in waves, in jets, in strong flashes of light. Free, once and for all, from the insidious atmosphere of the Lahore Fort and other police stations, we felt the firm ground beneath our feet from where we could boldly meet our fate. The time taken for the police investigation had been the period of incubation for a big conspiracy of falsehood and fabrication to hatch. They had many facts in their possession, intermixed with much of their own imaginings, and a hybrid creation was in existence for us to contend with. It was however a great relief to know where we stood. The burden of uncertainty was

taken off our minds.

The frenzy of our jollity and fun went on unabated till long past midnight and we hardly slept for even an hour.

In the morning our officer-in-charge came to unlock our barrack and told us to be ready at nine to go to the court. Let out, we surveyed our surroundings. It was an old hospital barrack, a four-wall within the greater four-wall, completely cut off from the rest of the jail. We went back inside to inspect the place where Hari Ram Pahlwan had met with an accident in the darkness of the night. The warder on duty asked us to stop our merriment and make haste in our preparations for court. Two lorries had come to the gate of the Borstal to take us to the Central Jail where the Special Tribunal was to hold its sessions. The Tribunal was appointed to try our case and deliver judgment from which it was originally intended there should be no appeal. Later on, the right of appeal to the High Court was allowed as a result of the countrywide agitation against the wide powers given to the Special Tribunal.

The "big three" of the police were present there, along with several of their lieutenants. There had been feverish activity on their part for the past three months and they were happy at its outcome. The future held for them the promise of rewards and promotions, the fruits of the labours which had given them a wide experience and knowledge about secret organisations. There were pride and satisfaction on the faces of the officers and hope in their hearts when they put up our *Challans* before the court.

We stood in handcuffs inside the enclosure newly constructed for us. There were about a dozen police constables standing guard to our left. In the front were the seats in two rows for the counsel for the defence and the prosecution. The rostrum for the judges was to our right. Several high police officials seated beside the counsel for the prosecution were like a buttress to the position of the latter. A high iron netting partitioned off the remaining space as a visitors' gallery.

Many lawyers from the city were present to give us advice though we had yet to decide as to who should take charge of our defence.

The Public Prosecutor, Pandit Jwala Parshad, a dignified Kashmiri Brahmin, in his gracefully tied milk-white turban, the conventional black coat and pyjama, rose from his chair to open the case for the prosecution. He was a scholarly figure who spoke in a lion's voice the language of the most learned.

There sat the President of the Tribunal, Mr. H. A. C. Blacker,

a man of calm observation with nothing conspicuous about him. He had been looking unobtrusively but continuously towards us, since the time we were produced in the court. The youngest of the judges, Mr. Sleem, a well-known lawyer from Lahore, sat to the left of the President. He looked smart and vivacious. There was a general restlessness about him; a trait common to men of extraordinary intellectual capacity. His smiling self-confident attitude put in unfavourable contrast the bearing of the third and the oldest of the judges, Rai Bahadur Gaṅga Ram Soni. He was a retired Sessions Judge of about seventy with an austere face, gaunt and thin frame and a shaky head. Age had affected the poise of his head, but the moment you heard his loud and firm voice, the voice that can command attention and check unnecessary interference, you knew that he was a man of unfailing energy.

We requested the judges to allow us certain facilities for defence, and to recommend better class treatment for us. Their reply was favourable. They rose for the day and we were sent back to the Borstal Jail.

We had not yet finished with the stories about the police treatment that each had to tell. The character and personality of different officers, approvers, and arrested persons set free on condition that they gave evidence came in for review showing how the memories of the Fort and other police stations were still affecting us.

"How did Pandit Inderpal, the chief actor in the drama, come to overplay his part?" was the question on everyone's lips.

"He took charge of our post-arrest activities and is still at the helm of our affairs. I feel he proposes to do nothing more than salvage work," said Pandit Rupchand, smiling confidently.

His enigmatic assertion was the occasion for a general analysis of Pandit Inderpal's character. Nobody had anything against him except the charge of desertion. The integrity of his past character threw a veil of mystery over his recent change of front. Pandit Rupchand and I exchanged our thoughts, and I felt more convinced of the soundness of the views expressed by Sirdar Partap Singh, D.S.P., in the Fort. The comrades who did not know Pandit Inderpal were naturally sceptic. We did not argue the matter with them.

Shiv Ram, approver, was described by the Rawalpindi comrades as a man who would go to any length to save his skin. Saran Das, his younger brother, was said to have become an approver only because of the unremitting pressure brought to bear by

Shiv Ram. We knew nothing about Khairaji Ram except the stories of the frequent visits of his rich relatives in cars to the Fort. There was no question of any opinion about the fifth approver, Madan Gopal, whom none of us had ever seen.

The main features of the case for the prosecution could be gathered from the police statements of the approvers, copies of which were supplied to us. We had had enough experience of the guiding force and the powerful influences behind these statements, but it in no way seemed to conflict with the natural optimism of some of us who believed that the case would be a total failure for the police. Such well-meaning friends advised us to apply ourselves vigorously to the matter of our defence. Others were in favour of using the trial for the purposes of political propaganda. One or two were of the opinion that we should first see whether the judges conducted the trial in a fair spirit or not and then decide our line of action. Discussions continued without any conclusive result.

Meanwhile the stories about police treatment were pouring in from all sides. Everybody's experience was unique. Dharam Vir's ordeal was the longest and the most severe. He had simply met brute force by his extraordinary endurance. A strong, plump and jolly young man with the body of a wrestler was best suited for physical suffering and he was moreover of the type in whom anything however disturbing hardly unbalanced his mental equilibrium. We teased him instead of sympathising with him. His fingers had been pressed with sticks between them, but nobody believed any torture could distort his features. He could give us no proof.

Sewa Ram had been arrested at Rawalpindi but was taken to an out-of-the-way police station of Golra, several miles away. The Sub-Inspector there thought he struck a gold mine when the case of a political conspirator was placed in his hands. What a successful career he could foresee for himself if he could only succeed in breaking the will of this young man! With this idea in his mind he lost no time in applying third degree methods against Sewa Ram whom he considered as a godsend. By and

his whole body until it took the form of a horrible torture which never seemed to stop. This device too failed to produce the desired result and the Sub-Inspector, flying into a rage, caught both of Sewa Ram's moustaches in his fingers and asked the constables to open the mouth of the wretch so that he might spit into it. These orders were hardly out of the Sub-Inspector's lips when Sewa Ram, taking advantage of the latter's lowered face, hurled a lump of expectoration straight into his throat. The action was so instantaneous and unexpected that the Sub-Inspector automatically let go Sewa Ram's moustaches and was too mortified to think of any swift retaliatory measure. Later on he ordered the accused to be tied to his *charpai*, which was then made to stand head-downwards beside a wall. The unfortunate man remained in this position until he fainted. The Sub-Inspector could not get a word out of him in spite of all the tortures that he could inflict.

Some other Rawalpindi comrades who were taken to outlying police stations were similarly ill-treated. It was sheer brute force applied without imagination and had failed. The officers in the Fort were not such dullards as to think of nothing but beating, so their blows alternated with the subtle propaganda which succeeded in poisoning the minds of some against the rest. They broke the resistance of some who gave statements and became approvers or witnesses under Section 164, and a comparative relaxation of pressure against the remaining accused was the result. Those sent to various out-of-the-way police stations were brought back to Rawalpindi or Lahore and placed under charge of officers more capable of securing their conviction.

We were again taken to the court in the prisoners' vans, Malik Kundan Lal's thundering voice leading us in revolutionary slogans. Reaching our enclosure we sang a revolutionary song. The judges came and the court proceedings commenced.

The President informed us that the Government had sanctioned Rs. 128 per day for three defence counsel who were to defend all the twenty-six accused. The court adjourned to give us time to make our selection of these three lawyers.

CHAPTER. 11

SIMPLE AND LOVING

COMING out of the courtroom, into the open courtyard, we stood waiting for the prison vans to take us back to the Borstal Jail. The Inspector in charge of the police guard marched us towards the front wall in which there was an iron gate on which he tapped again and again.

"Are we not going to the Borstal?" asked one of us of the Inspector.

We were greatly intrigued at his enigmatic answer; "Yes, there is another path, a short one that will save much trouble!"

We felt they did not want to take us by the open road where people had gathered and shouted revolutionary slogans in response to those raised by us from the prison vans. The iron gate opened at last and to our surprise we found ourselves in the Central Jail. So we had changed "homes." The chief warder of the Central Jail took charge of us and after a minute search of everyone led us to No. 14 Old, a ward where condemned prisoners were formerly kept. The place had a sinister appearance and the narrow compound looked gloomy even in broad daylight. It was only about four o'clock in the afternoon. We had entered through a small iron window and stood outside waiting for our luggage to arrive from the Borstal Jail. No one showed any curiosity to go inside a cell or walk around the place. It was a double row of cells like the vertebral column of a huge prehistoric animal, with its curved tail jutting into two other rows of cells on either side, leaving a narrow irregular and open space to walk around.

Our luggage came and the officer in charge asked us to occupy the cells in such a way as to leave one cell vacant between the two occupied on either side. We walked around the place and had a look at the inside of the cells. We came back to our starting point but had not seen all. There was yet another row of cells. From that row came the voices of men! We went round the place again and discovered the hidden row of cells, called "Badmash Line." Some prisoners with brooms in their hands were busy cleaning the cells under the supervision of a convict Lambardar, a terrible-looking dark-skinned Baloch, aptly called "Afim" (opium). There were more than fifty cells in all.

whereas we were only twenty-six, but the authorities were not prepared to accommodate any other prisoners in our ward and thus we were distributed all over the place and locked in.

Night came earlier in these *kutcha* cells than in the rest of the jail and there was no arrangement for light. We called to one another from our respective cells and raised revolutionary slogans. Next morning we were charged with acting against jail rules, because neither shouting nor talking aloud was allowed. In the evening we were supplied with hurricane lamps and also permitted to occupy the cells in any order we liked. We vacated the Badmash Line and came over to the row of cells nearer the gate. The new condemned cells, called Ward No. 15, where Sirdar Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh-Dev were confined were situated close to our ward. All the condemned prisoners exchanged greetings after nightfall and talked aloud till about eleven. The rule for observing silence was the same for all the prisoners in the jail, but the jail authorities were unable to enforce it against those in the condemned cells awaiting death. We would continue to be silent when it was talking time for the condemned prisoners, in the hope of catching the voices of the three patriots sentenced to death, but rarely succeeded because of the general uproar caused by all the occupants of that ward talking at the same time. There too came the inevitable silence, the eternal counterpart of man's noisy and feverish activity.

Many lawyers had come to see us during the last five or six days. We had had daily interviews with about a dozen of them. They were business-like, polite and anxious about our defence. Some had been recommended by our friends and relatives. We differed amongst ourselves, as to which of them should be chosen. It seemed difficult to arrive at a unanimous decision, more so because not all of us were interested in defending ourselves. "Legal squabbling was a poor attitude of mind, when it was a question of direct armed clash with the tyrants of our nation," opined some, of course not without reason. The majority were in favour of letting the farce of a trial begin, leaving such questions as the boycott of the court, and refusal to offer any defence, for future decision according to circumstances as they might shape themselves. Even the Deputy Superintendent of the jail offered an opinion about a certain lawyer. We disregarded that opinion but were later proved to be in the wrong.

One afternoon, a middle-aged, simple-looking man dressed in khadi, with a Gandhi cap on his almost bald head, came to see us. There was a care-worn expression on his face as he took

his seat on a small stool—we had no chairs—and waited, with one leg thrown over the other, for all of our comrades to gather together. His feet were covered in old-fashioned black shoes, broad at the toes. There was neither a show of politeness nor cordiality from either side. A blanket was spread on the ground and we all sat down in a semicircle around him.

He told us that he was Sham Lal, Advocate from Rohtak. He said he had been serving his sentence in Gujrat special jail and still had about a month's more imprisonment to undergo, but his fellow *satyagrahi* prisoners insisted that he should get more remission and be released earlier in order to come to us and see whether he could be of any help.

Several Congress leaders confined at the time in Gujrat jail were known to some of us who began to make enquiries about the conditions there, but L. Sham Lal's replies were short and disinterested. Nevertheless he informed us, still looking care-worn, "The Congressmen there were very disappointed at the tragic turn of events in the case of Sirdar Bhagat Singh and his comrades. Those five youths have gone almost undefended. We were shocked to learn about the wholesale arrests in connection with your case. It is simply outrageous to see our young men sentenced to death without even the satisfaction of lawful defence."

"We can't pin our hopes on defence, which is not a very desirable thing for revolutionaries," said one of us.

Lalaji looked pained but said nothing in reply. He continued after a pause, "I had given up my practice in the non-co-operation days and vowed not to resume the profession for the remainder of my life, but I am ready to break my vows if you so desire."

There was an awkward pause, as none of us gave a reply.

Lalaji continued, "I am emphatically of the opinion that you should defend your case. Boycotting of the court is useless. You should consult your relatives and friends and inform me if you would engage my services."

Here he stopped short. We looked at one another while he was taking a casual view of the place. He looked again towards us in expectation of something we might say, but all were silent. We discussed nothing. All eyes were upon him. How simple he was with a disarming sincerity displayed over his homely features!

All of a sudden, Malik Nathu Ram was heard to say, "We have full faith in you. We need not consult anyone else. You are the senior counsel and on you lies the responsibility of choos-

ing your juniors."

Laughter and smiles were the indication of our relief at coming to this definite decision.

Lala Sham Lal too smiled and said, "Revolutionaries suffer no division of opinion when it comes to taking a step. I am glad that you are going to defend your case; you would have to pay heed to the advice of an old man like me in the conduct of your defence and not give way to emotions on momentous questions affecting your life." I am greatly satisfied at the confidence you have shown in me. Well, now I go. Next time I come, I shall ask you about your studies, about books and other needful things you are interested in."

CHAPTER 12

TO BEGIN WITH—!

THE Public Prosecutor, portly of figure and fair of complexion, rose to address the court, his face beaming with satisfaction. At the outset he traced the origin of conspiracy cases, beginning from Shri Aurobindo Ghosh as the founder of the terrorist movement, and passing on to various old-time terrorists and their activities, came to dwell upon the famous 1914-15 conspiracy to overthrow the British Raj. He himself had been a junior counsel on the prosecution side in that case. He grew eloquent over the dangerous effects that conspiracy had produced upon the minds of young men of the time. Referring to the Kakori Case, he dwelt upon it at length to emphasise the activities of a dangerous revolutionary, Pandit Chandrashekhar Azad, who was a declared absconder in the present case. Azad, he said, had played a conspicuous part in the case of S. Bhagat Singh and others, the main charge against whom was the murder of Mr. Saunders, a European Deputy Superintendent of Police. He was alleged to be one of those who shot him. He and four other absconders of the above-mentioned case, said Pandit Jwala Parshad, met together to reorganise after the arrest of their associate conspirators, and the present conspiracy was the result. The activities of this later group of dangerous criminals, form the basis of the present trial, declared the learned Public Prose-

cutor. He proposed to produce five approvers and about seven hundred prosecution witnesses of an independent character to prove their guilt.

He then made a brief reference to the particular activities of different accused persons put up for trial. He narrated the story of the partially successful attempt to blow up the Viceregal train near Delhi and charged the absconders, Bhagwati Charan and Yashpal, with being the chief organisers of the plot. Herein came the reference to the part played by Pandit Inderpal, the shrewdest member of the party co-opted by the two revolutionary leaders.

The substance of what the Public Prosecutor related further was this; Inderpal lived in the guise of a Sadhu in Badarpur village near Delhi to study the situation and help mature the bomb-outrage plot. The Party members visited him dressed as disciples and brought bombs, wires, implements and various other articles that were required. They worked with Pandit Inderpal at night. Yashpal, Bhag Ram and Hans Raj "Wireless" were lending their active help in the execution of the plan. The bomb was placed underneath the railway line and exploded at the time when the Viceregal train passed; there was fortunately no derailment, but only damage to the train. Inderpal returned to Lahore. He had brought an impression of dissatisfaction with one of the leaders of the Party, namely Yashpal, a former friend of his whom he had long been helping with money. The experience gained by him while actively participating in important Party-work, had shaken his faith in his old friend. He began to think of organising an independent group which was to work more wholeheartedly and less self-sparingly. He gathered around him such enthusiastic youths as Gulab Singh, Hans Raj, Rupchand, Bhag Ram, Amrik Singh, and Jahangiri Lal and succeeded in organising them into a party called "Atshi-Chakkar." These young men met together at the *baithak* of Pandit Rupchand in Gawal Mandi and their deliberations resulted in the emergence of a plan to perpetrate simultaneous bomb-outrages at six different places. They had their Party members at Rawalpindi who undertook to carry out the outrage in that city. On the 19th of June 1930 the bombs exploded at the same time in six different cities, namely Lahore, Sheikhpura, Gujranwala, Amritsar, Lyallpur and Rawalpindi, resulting in loss of life and property. One police officer was killed at Gujranwala, another at Lyallpur and several seriously injured. A bomb was deliberately exploded in each of the houses hired for the purpose in these six places,

in order to draw the attention of the police, and another burst out when the latter went in to carry out investigations. Inderpal and Gulab Singh went to Rawalpindi and after making arrangements for the explosion there, came back to organise similar action at Sheikhupura. Jahangiri Lal accompanied them to the latter place. Back from Sheikhupura, Gulab Singh went to Gujranwala and took his brother Amrik Singh along with him. Next, he (Gulab Singh) went to Amritsar with L. Kundan Lal as his helper and came back to Lahore leaving him to ignite the decoy bomb. Hans Raj "Wireless," Rupchand and Khairati Ram had meanwhile gone to Lyallpur to make similar arrangements there. Pandit Inderpal had to see to the explosion at Lahore and was assisted in this action by Jai Parkash and Dianat Rai. In addition to this the Party was responsible for various other dangerous schemes and actions. A bomb was thrown at a police party assembled to disperse foreign cloth picketers in the Raja Bazaar of Rawalpindi. Amrik Singh was involved in an accidental explosion which occurred in a confectioner's shop in Sayed Mitha Bazaar of Lahore where he had stopped with a suitcase containing explosive substances, while on his way to Shahdara where experiments were to be carried out. Another dangerous plan of the Party, designed to rescue Bhagat Singh and others being tried in this very place where the present court sat, was upset by the death of one of the main organisers of the Party, Bhagwati Charan. This in brief was the story of the crimes of the accused, and the prosecution would produce evidence to prove the truth of all the charges against them.

The learned Public Prosecutor had traced the history of our "crimes" from the time when the majority of us were not even born. It was however gratifying to learn from him that we were successors to a line of great revolutionary personalities. In my humble view then, which is still the same, we were responsible only for what we had done and not for the past history of the revolutionary movement which had influenced our mind. The President of the Tribunal casually remarked that according to English law we could be held responsible for all the past actions of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army if we were proved to be its members. The law in India was different, however, said Mr. Blacker. The inaugurating speech of the Public Prosecutor had the force and charm of imagination in it. The story of our own activities which he described from hearsay, not without poetic exaggeration, was really interesting to us. His eloquence made the adventures of our lives look more thrilling than they

really were. He called us fanatics and murderers and painted a gruesome picture of our revolutionary life, fully acting according to the good advice contained in the proverb "well begun is half done." The onus of proving to the contrary lay on us.

Some preliminary evidence was recorded for a few days, and then came Pandit Inderpal, the most important prosecution witness, into the dock. Dressed in a smart brown suit, he stood bareheaded before the judges, a seemingly indifferent target for the eyes of all the rest. He cast a casual glance towards our enclosure and then averted his gaze. Pandit Rupchand and I, his intimate friends, looked anxiously at him for a minute or two and then automatically turned our faces from him.

"What do you say?" asked Pandit Rupchand in an undertone. "Circumstances have fundamentally changed both for him and for us," I whispered back.

"No! Look at his dress. It is his own old suit and not a gift from the police."

I could not share the optimism of my comrade. The idea of Pandit Inderpal's having come directly from the camp of the enemy had made me a bit doubtful of his integrity. It was not a question of truth, of honesty, of avoiding falsehoods and exaggerations, but of loyalty on his part towards his former associates. I could not reconcile myself to the idea of his being the chief prosecution-witness though in my heart of hearts I had already conceded to him the right of saving himself from the gallows. There was every chance of his being hanged, had he been with us. The appellation of "approver" affixed to his name did not of course detract from his character, but could he avoid becoming an enemy if he chose the path of a neutral really limiting himself to the statement of facts about us? It was time for him to decide one way or the other. If he chose the side against us, he would have to bow to the will of the police in spite of the inner truthfulness of his nature. Every one of us who knew him intimately knew for certain that there could be no question of meanness on his part. I believed that he would tell nothing but the truth if he chose the safe side. We had died in the old world and begun life in the new. Former loyalties and sentiments did not matter. It was the cold logic of circumstances having its sway. He was perfectly free to say what he liked. I for my part intensely disliked the idea of any hostile expression on his part that might leave a genuine grievance to rankle in my heart. We had been tormenting ourselves with questions for several days and his presence in the witness box now, had added poign-

ancy to them.

"Is he still a comrade?" "What has happened to him under police custody?" "Is he whole still or broken in part?" "Have his personal interests become so great, so pressing as to brook no meddling with, even if it might be an idea, a thought, a memory of our vow to live and die together for the common cause of our country's freedom?" Never had the minutest difference arisen between us in relation to our ideology, when we were outside. We were one family, one instrument, one voice tuned to the song of revolution! We breathed happiness . . . but why should I go on with my silent questioning, I thought, when the answer to everything was at hand. I looked at him. He was still facing the judges.

Pandit Inderpal coughed a little, and then began his evidence in an indifferent, unconcerned way. He related the story of his life from his earliest childhood till he came to Lahore in search of employment. He mentioned Yashpal. He told about the origin of the conspiracy and described his part in the attempt to derail the Viceregal train.

All this was not said in a day. A week and a half had passed and he was yet far from mentioning the part of any other accused present in court. He had the Brahmin's typical memory and gave exceptionally clear and vivid pictures of various events and episodes of his revolutionary career leaving no details unmentioned. In an impressive statement he told the court what marvellous ingenuity, courage and resourcefulness he had shown while living as a Sadhu near Delhi. He came to wield great influence over the illiterate village-folk, for whom he was a doctor, a palmist, a man of God, in short, everything. He told interesting anecdotes of his social life amongst peasants. He was gaining his former enthusiasm and jollity of mood as the story progressed. He had an intelligent way of answering questions occasionally put by the court.

The C.I.D. officers looked jubilant. The Public Prosecutor regarded himself as the happiest and the luckiest in the profession. We, the accused, had become familiar with the situation, as the term goes, and were no longer so keenly interested in the witness as we had been in the first day or two.

Pandit Rupchand was still of the opinion that Pandit Inderpal could never be a tool of the police. I told him that to expect the worst was the best attitude to adopt.

"I wish he could help us die together on the gallows, but the thing won't happen so far as he is concerned," remarked

Pandit Rupchand without a trace of anxiety on his expressions.

"It would be a hard problem indeed for him to repudiate his past so completely as the police wanted him to, but he won't be able to save himself if he tried to save us too," I observed, wishing with all my heart that he would break the suspense by definitely taking the line of either an enemy or a friend.

We went again to the court next day. One of the C.I.D. men with long and crooked moustaches remarked, "We shall have little to bother; our single witness Inderpal will prove the case." Sirdar Partap Singh, D.S.P., was also there. I remembered his opinion and wondered what he now thought about that. To try only ten or twelve accused and finish the case in less than six months was what he would have done, and here was more than a month gone without any important evidence concluded. "Inderpal would take not less than six months," another officer was heard to say.

A day or two later Pandit Inderpal astonished all those present in court by his denunciation of the police officers, whom he accused of tampering with the statements of the approvers and others, and of deliberately and maliciously throwing the burden of the actions committed by the absconders too on the accused under trial.

There was great consternation amongst the members of the C.I.D. present in court. The Public Prosecutor winced at the remarks of the witness and hastily throwing the papers in his hands on the table inquired, "What do you mean by this?"

"I mean to relate only the true facts and nothing more," replied the witness calmly.

"Go on," exclaimed the Public Prosecutor sullenly.

We knew that Pandit Inderpal was a fearless man and had never believed him to be capable of degrading himself to the depths of unprincipled selfishness. Many of us would not have hated him very much even if he had proved a tool in the hands of the police. It was really strange to be so indulgent towards an approver, but the fact that a man of unquestionable character had turned King's witness could not be overlooked. We were therefore not very much surprised at his conduct.

The witness told the court that there were three categories of revolutionaries in the Party, viz., full members in the know of plans, helpers who knew they were assisting in the Party work, only when assistance was asked of them without being taken into confidence, and the sympathisers who were not allowed to understand the significance of the help rendered by them.

The Public Prosecutor was not happy over this classification of terrorists into different categories and shook his head, but he was not in a position, especially at this stage of the case, to declare his chief witness hostile. He refused to believe what was actually happening before his eyes, to wit, the sifting of the truth from the falsehoods piled up against us by the police. The witness stood resolute and unperturbed at the indignant looks of the police officers sitting uneasy in their chairs. The Public Prosecutor suffered him to go on with his evidence.

CHAPTER 13

UNDER A NEW SKY

AT this stage, Sita Ram, a declared absconder in our case, was arrested and produced in the court. The whole of the evidence had to be repeated for him. Pandit Inderpal started from the beginning. None of us, except the new-comer, were interested in what was to be said in the court during the coming fortnight.

It was evident that Pandit Inderpal would take more than six months to conclude his evidence, and if each of the remaining approvers took at least a month, we could safely expect a year to pass. There were seven hundred more prosecution witnesses who might land us in the third or even the fourth year of trial, before the final judgment came. Our interest in the case naturally dwindled. The majority of us gave up attending the court on the excuse of illness and were represented in our absence by our counsel. There was a legal-minded group headed by Jahangiri Lal and consisting of his two brothers L. Kundan Lal and Jai Parkash and their relative, Bhim Sen, with the addition of Krishan Gopal of Rawalpindi and one or two others who regularly went to the court and assisted L. Sham Lal and his juniors in our defence. The rest had to appear whenever an identification parade for them was to be held. Were it possible to be identified by proxy, they would have accepted the procedure and willingly suffered the consequences but the law was too conventional to be so obliging.

We wanted to utilise the long period at our disposal for studies and educational progress. The junior defence counsel were dis-

pleased at our lack of interest in the proceedings of the court but we pleaded ignorance of law and its intricacies. L. Sham Lal, on the other hand, encouraged us indirectly by supplying our need for books, periodicals, etc., and had arranged in addition for five memberships of the Public Library, which meant forty excellent books every month for us to read. A daily newspaper was a luxury totally prohibited in the jail, but we were allowed the local vernacular *Milap* in the court, so some of us went to read it and came back to the jail within half an hour or so. The kindly and indulgent L. Sham Lal smiled upon us with his sympathy, his untiring work, and his anxiety to save us. Each one of us went at least once a week to the court to have an opportunity of talking with him on matters other than our defence. He too would not forget to pay us an occasional visit inside the jail in spite of pressing work.

Ward No. 14 lost its gloomy aspect and resounded with cheerful sounds all day long. We had, so to say, settled in the jail, though the conditions under which we lived were far from satisfactory. Whatever difficulty we tried to solve brought us into conflict with the jail authorities. The light of a hurricane lamp was insufficient for reading at night. The books we obtained from outside were disallowed by the censoring authority on the flimsiest grounds. One with a red cover, for example, could never enter the jail. A title suggestive of a political subject made the book the most suspicious thing in the eyes of the officers. Writing material was taboo. We had to argue, to quarrel over the most common necessities of a decent life, because the officers were neither accustomed to requests of an unusual type such as ours nor to yielding without opposition. The vegetables supplied to us were overripe, the flour never free of sand and grit. The common salt contained the leavings of rats, the chillies something else, and so on with each and every article of consumption. Our segregation from the rest of the jail population was a serious concern for the authorities. We invariably made a bad impression whenever we complained to them against corruption or against the treatment meted out to "C" class prisoners. The path from our ward to the court was guarded by convict officers at the times of our coming and going, and any prisoner trying to talk or even to make a sign to us was punished there and then or put up before the Superintendent. We could see no difference between the jail authorities and the police and suspected them to be in secret alliance with each other. The Superintendent, Major Briggs, never tried to understand our viewpoint. There was for

him no reasonable or genuine complaint in our ward but only the creating of unnecessary trouble by hard-headed terrorists. He seldom agreed to allow us any facility but did not object if his Deputy did so. Experience told us that he would consider our requests if we made them through his Deputy and not directly to him. We took our complaints into the court on several occasions and the judges called for the Superintendent whenever they considered the matter fit for their intervention. Our conditions had begun to improve.

Whether the conflict with those who carried out the law eased or took a difficult turn, depended much upon the mood of those in power. Imagine the extent of the constraint upon a man who could not even keep a needle or thread without permission! The dependence of a prisoner on the officers for the necessities of life, big or small, was a relationship amounting to the most abject slavery ever forced upon man! It was but natural that the prisoner's life was a continuous defiance of impediments, restrictions, everything imposed by rules and regulations, and that his struggles relieved him to an extent from a feeling of suffocation the atmosphere created.

The interviews allowed with our relatives were never an unmixed pleasure because of the humiliating restrictions imposed upon them. My brothers had met me during my later days in the Fort; but the police officer presiding at the interview had strictly limited us not to talk any more than inquire about each other's health. I could also tell them about the articles of clothing, bedding, etc., that I required. The police imposed such a restriction because they wanted to hide the actual conditions in the Fort from outsiders, but the jail authorities had nothing to fear from our relatives to be so exacting and strict about interviews.

Our officer-in-charge is, in his official capacity, an abnormal being. He watches, notes, and observes the minutest things connected with us. He sits near at the interviews, even in the presence of ladies. He reads the letters we send or receive, censors everything that passes the jail gate and comes to our ward. He knows our poverty, the economic condition of our relatives. Although we may feel the impropriety of his knowing about our family matters we can't help it. No human being can be great or noble in his eyes. He is on duty as a cynic, a spy, an indecent meddler with the private affairs of others, and he can't be expected to be sympathetic. Through him we might realise that the whole official machinery of the Government can't be

sympathetic. A prisoner has to fight at every step for his self respect, honour, decency. There is no civilised treatment for him.

Sukhdev Raj, another absconder in our case, was arrested about three and a half months of our trial in the court. The evidence was not begun again this time and his case was kept from ours for reasons of economy. The Tribunal had by this time delivered judgment in the Zira Bomb Case, the sentence not exceeding three years for each of the accused. Sukhdev Raj's case was taken up for hearing once or twice a week after lunch time. He was kept separate from us but the jail authorities had to allow him to see us two or three times a week. He was an M.A. student from Lahore and was alleged to have been in the company of Pandit Chandrashekhar Azad who had recently died in a desperate fight with the police in a garden at Allahabad. Sukhdev Raj was said to have escaped unhurt under cover of continuous fire from both sides.

He was an asset to our society. His taste and choice of books were excellent. Wit and wisdom encompassed all his versatile interests. He was a slow and deliberate reader and an enthusiastic admirer of Bernard Shaw. Psychology was his favourite subject in addition to literature. His interest in astronomy was often the cause of conflict with the jail warders at lock-up time. His coming to see us more often than permitted was another source of trouble with the officers. Nothing could curb his free spirit. It was a pleasure to read together with him: the result was a hectic effort at all-round progress. Some tried languages, others political literature. Sukhdev Raj, Pandit Rupchand and I read together the books considered difficult. Our thirst for knowledge increased more and more with him.

Keeping good health was another objective not lost sight of in our enthusiasm for studies. Dharam Vir, the protagonist of physical culture, was daily practising five hundred *baithaks* and as many *dands*. His exercise occupied more than two hours of the early morning and was finished before anyone else was awake. This was his daily routine, going through with it for his body's sake, and exhorting others to do likewise. He organised an *Akhada* and gave wrestling lessons to a few amenable to his influence; others made him the butt of their jokes. He was more than a match against the fun of all others combined. The need for mental exercise is not usually felt by such people. He rarely paid heed to books. Blows flowed in upon him from all sides in response to his jokes that never irritated. Easy and

overflowing, his vivacity knew no bounds. Bookworms like Pandit Rupchand were his special target.

Mahatma Gandhi's *Arogya Sadhana* long remained a popular book with some. Malik Nathu Ram, the veteran Congress worker, became an exponent of the efficiency of saltless diet. Three or four, including myself, resorted to one meal a day and continued the practice for more than a year.

There was little space in our ward for outdoor games such as volley-ball or badminton. It naturally produced more champions of indoor games such as *chaupar* and cards. Coming out of our cells after four or five hours' continuous reading, we would add our noise to those of the playing parties and feel refreshed.

Bhag Ram had organised a gossip-club and held forth the view that sundry benefits accrued to man from talkativeness. This advocate of expressionism had all the qualities of a man of speech. Fine words fell from his mouth in perfect array. He would translate his gossip into action, suddenly appearing in the garb of a *Hato* (Kashmiri labourer) to amuse the audience with the patois of those people. There was a great variety of extempore farces in his mental bag and he had a method of his own for executing them. He would place himself in an inviting position for questions to which he provided well-befitting answers in the *Hato* language.

Amrik Singh gathered around him the convict workers in our kitchen, and the sweeper and his organization gradually blossomed into a song-party propagating the name of the famous pastoral poet of "Hir Ranjha."

There developed amongst us, with the lapse of time, a Ghar-shna party, its foremost advocate being Pandit Rupchand who grew into a veritable enemy of towels. He as well as a few others would go on bathing for hours rubbing their bodies all the while. A towel could hardly withstand this unprecedented form of violence for more than a couple of months. We saw many a victim grow shorter and thinner and then vanish altogether from the plane of existence.

Bhim Sen, who as a matter of policy belonged to the group bent on fighting the case, had his emotional sympathies elsewhere. He was as a rule on intimate terms with those who kept big stocks of cigarettes and *bidis*. He would share his own stock with them till their's dwindled to a few cigarettes and then switch over his sympathies towards the party yet on a safe economic basis. His interests were multiple and far-reaching. A *landur* (oven) was, for example, installed in a corner of our ward, mainly

at his instance, and he himself took pains to train a who in due time began to bake excellent *chapatis* for us. Finding anyone alone, looking thoughtful, comrade Bhim Sen would go straight to him and coax him into genial conversation, in spite of the other's protestations against such an intrusion. This man was a friend of all and enemy of none.

We too had festival days like the world at large, which was celebrated with much enthusiasm. Comrade Krishan Lal knew the culinary art of creating beautiful dishes out of simple, ordinary things, had an exceptional talent for organising and managing tea-parties, etc. His decorating and furnishing of rooms, his arrangement and sense of proportion spoke of a highly cultivated aesthetic sense.

Sewa Ram was a distinct personality, cool-headed and care-free and reserved towards none. He would sing in a woman's voice and execute various tunes on the instrument of his throat. He knew how to dance. A *jaltarang* was improvised by him out of tea-cups. His bursting forth into song early in the morning while still in bed wrapped up in his quilt was a delectable performance enjoyed by the early risers only. He was a goldsmith, a blacksmith, a tool-maker, a mechanic, an artist, besides being a genial soul. His hands worked with the capacity of a precision tool at making independent pens, nibs, small articles for adornment and other uses, and this hobby he found difficult to give up even in jail. He made his own tools out of any scrap of iron he could lay hands on and began some productive labour. This habit of his was anathema to the jail officers, who carried out more searches of our ward than was customary.

Hari Ram Pahlwan would rise early and raise his voice in song till it rose to the majesty of thunder and the thrill of lightning. It was a pleasant awakening, his melodious song heralding the dawn.

Malik Nathu Ram was a man with an affectionate nature. He had also tenacity of purpose and energy and was a great social figure. He shone at "public functions" held in our ward, because of his great aptitude for "public service." His little sacrifices for the general good enhanced the effect of his magnetic personality. He was past his prime and could take little part in the boisterous activity of the young, yet always seemed to be flushed with the joy of living. His nature was that of a born optimist; a man of faith and friendship. For sometime he practised mesmerism with the object of concentration of mind, in which I too joined him for a short period.

The diverse idiosyncrasies of man went side by side with his ideals. We were going through a transitional period in our lives, after which there was to be a complete change of values and a new pattern of life. The urge for individual experience in this hedged-in and limited world of ours was strong. Every one of us was consciously or subconsciously preparing for the future. Some had death in view, others long sentences, and the rest the freedom that their acquittal would give them. We tried our best to establish contact with the "C" class prisoners living in the barracks beside our ward. No enforced seclusion could deter us from taking interest in the jail population. We were ready to help them in their struggles, difficulties and needs whenever we got the chance.

Agreeable companionship, in short, had made our life as pleasant as possible; we were becoming more and more interested in "society" at the cost of interest in our defence. The indifferent ones were accustomed to read the good or evil nature of the day's proceedings in court in the faces of those who formed the legal group, as they appeared in the evening. The latter were, however, not the reticent sort of people who would only yield to persuasion or persistent requests. Jahangiri Lal would come in beaming with satisfaction and exclaiming loudly immediately after entering the little gate of our ward, in case some lucky turn of events had occurred that day. "All shall be acquitted," he would declare. Lala Kundan Lal, his elder brother, would announce with all the seriousness of a legal mind that the prosecution case had suffered such and such a devastating blow at the hands of such and such a witness, but he could hardly arouse enthusiasm in the minds of the confirmed "unbelievers." The very next day one of these enthusiasts would draw expert conclusions from the evidence so far produced in court and tell us who was to get ten years, who eight, who four, and so on. Jahangiri Lal, a keen observer of human nature, was too conscious of the likely effect of such hazardous remarks to forecast more than 'two years' rigorous imprisonment for Hari Ram Pahlwan. The latter would frown at the mention of three years but for him who said five or six years there would be the forward lunge of his raised fist. Bansi Lal of Rawalpindi with his ever-itching tongue would have his ears pulled by Hari Ram for pronouncing long sentences against him, but he would not mind even blows from Pahlwanji, for the pleasure he got from his joke. Repetition did not detract from the interest of the witticism because of Pahlwan's vigilant attitude against bantering tongues. Bansi

Lal was like an ever-singing lark and could not check his humour even when matters looked gloomy and dismal. He and Dharam Vir were most happy under the rain of fisticuffs and blows on their backs. One was thin like a reed, the other fat, but their spirits were identical. They would never miss a chance of making merry at the expense of the legal group. The latter retaliated by predicting fourteen years for either of them. It was characteristic of these legal luminaries to go no further than fourteen years. They never talked of death sentences, because they were in reality more sympathetic and considerate than legal-minded. A flaw in their judgment, often pointed out by the loose-tongued Bansi Lal and Dharam Vir, in the language of laymen, was that they spoke of nothing but honourable acquittal for those of their group, whereas they thought in terms of "extraordinary doses" for the others. Persisting in an attitude even under heavy odds is, however, deserving of reward, and one of the legal luminaries, Jahangiri Lal, had the title of "High Court" conferred on him with due ceremony one day, under the splendour of a weather-beaten flag, consisting of a rag that the breeze had blown upon the electric pole in front of his cell. An illiterate Purbia prisoner working in our kitchen transformed the august name of "High Court" into simple "Hari Kot" (green coat) little knowing that simplicity and grandeur do not go side by side. The dignity of the title, nevertheless, remained unimpaired for many years after!

CHAPTER 14

THE THREE SURETIES

THE three comrades in the condemned cells lay waiting for their death. From the four corners of the country rose the voice in favour of commutation of their sentence. Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Motilal Nehru and all the outstanding personalities of India bestirred themselves to save the lives of these patriots. The dumb millions of our country gathered together in masses in cities, towns, villages, and urged upon the Government to stop their execution. There was no organisation that did not put in an appeal for the sake of these young men. Men

of all creeds, all persuasions, classes, professions, sects, joined in their prayers for these lives to be spared. Sympathy for them was voiced even in foreign countries. Innumerable appeals daily pouring in from every part of our sub-continent, were in the character of a united demand of all our countrymen. Had there been a popular government in India, it would have inevitably bowed to the will of her millions. Our alien masters were not moved at all! They could not be made to feel that life imprisonment for these young men in place of death would serve the purpose of justice.

There was hope in the heart of the masses. It is the concomitant of every united effort, every large-scale struggle. We in the prison knew from the increase of police and military guards around the four walls of the Central Jail, that the hope was a false one. There were increasing signs that the execution was only a matter of a few days.

A plum tree stood outside the gate of the condemned cells underneath which we daily stood before going to the court. This is where we were searched before being taken to or brought back from the court. The place made us highly conscious of the proximity of the three condemned patriots. Our eyes would search in vain for them in the cells; because even the outer doors were shut at the time of our coming and going. All of us had begun attending the court these days, and some came back earlier than usual with the object of having a glimpse of one of our condemned comrades knowing that they were in turn let out into the open courtyard for a short time in the day. Even this meagre contact was to be had very rarely. It amounted to a little more than proximity, to be face to face with the pulsating life in them switched to the tune of extreme sacrifice. No one could say with certainty when that pulsation would cease. Any day, any hour, might bring them the signal to offer their youthful lives at the altar of freedom.

One of the prisoners who had to go, in the course of his duties, into both the wards, sometimes acted as a messenger. One day, we sent a message to Sirdar Bhagat Singh expressing a faint hope that the expectations of our countrymen might prove true and that they might be saved! He sent back in reply a couplet of Iqbal written on a bit of paper in Urdu.

کوئی دم کا ہمال ہوں لے اہل محفل۔ چراغ سمر ہوں بجھا چاہتا ہوں

"A few moments more and I go out like the wick of the lamp in the morning!"

No false hopes, no weakening of the resolve to die smilingly; a steeled heart, a courageous mind, audacious thinking, no illusions, no wavering, no flickering like the wick of the lamp, but a continuous flame emitting abundant heat and light till the last extinguishing blow: that was what I read from the lines of the poet scribbled on a bit of paper by S. Bhagat Singh.

What a tragedy it was that none of us living so near could be allowed to see these young men and know their last thoughts, their ideas, views, feelings, reconsidered in the light of their impending death and the terrible experiences they had had! An unthinking machine and not a human agency was going to put an end to their lives or otherwise it would have itself shown a human interest in them or allowed others to do so. Their execution had this very inhuman aspect among others of a suppressive and crushing nature.

It took place in the evening of the 23rd of March 1930, just before sunset. Executions always take place in the morning but this practice was set aside in the case of these young men. All the prisoners in the jail, including us, were locked inside in the afternoon. A big officer was visiting the jail, we were told. It struck us that the officer or officers might be coming to see to the carrying out of the executions. We stopped talking from our respective cells and listened. No voice came from the side of Ward No. 15. Not a soul moved in the jail. Such an unusual silence was portentous. The invisible god of death was stalking the place. The whole of the population breathed uneasiness, suspicion, curiosity! The warders stood silently outside the locked barracks and cells. The officers of the jail one by one came and went round the places under their charge. An hour and a half passed, and then we heard the voice of Sirdar Bhagat Singh informing his two companions that "They have come!"

The three shouted thrice "Long Live Revolution!" and we echoed them.

Not more than five minutes passed and they were on the gallows. We only heard the crashing sound of the falling plank!

Several high-ranking officials had attended the execution. The dead bodies were not taken out through the main gate, but through that of the smithy adjoining the building where the Special Tribunal trying us was holding its sessions. They were not handed over to the relatives or friends of the martyrs, but taken in lorries to the bank of the Sutlej, only half-burnt there and

thrown into the river.

All these matters relating to the after-death treatment meted out to them we learnt from the next day's papers. Hearing the thud of the plank, we in our mad fury began to shout revolutionary slogans and shake the barred doors of our cells. The people living in the bungalows across the jail road guessed from the noise inside the jail what had happened, and a pursuit party was organised to follow in cars the lorries which were taking the dead bodies away. They found some charred and mutilated remains of the martyrs on the bank of the Sutlej.

Every jail employee who met us paid a glowing tribute to the courage of the three at the moment of their execution. Nobody was without admiration, sympathy and a word of praise. Most of the prisoners fasted, others prayed for the souls of the martyrs, not a soul seemed to be unaffected by the tragedy. Many a warder actually wept while relating the tales of their prison life. Some had been on duty in the condemned cells, others had been in charge over them while they were under-trial prisoners. They depicted the feelings of the common man. Their sympathies, genuine no doubt, were typical of Indian character. The extreme penalty for the three was too shocking for our countrymen. It was the same helpless grief-felt all over the land.

CHAPTER 15

A DEATH AND A LINGERING DEATH

PANDIT Inderpal made sensational allegations in the court against the investigating C.I.D. officers, giving various instances of tampering with evidential documents, of falsification of original police reports, even of actual forgery. He charged the Magistrates visiting the Fort during the investigations, with acquiescence in frequent after-changes made from time to time in the statements given before them by the approvers and other witnesses. The reason why all this was done in his presence was that he was believed to be totally in league with the police. It was characteristic of Inderpal to remain the same nonchalant and independent sort of witness throughout the lengthy period of his evidence. The story that he related differed greatly from what the police

had required him to parrot before the judges; but the prosecution did not lose heart, still having the bulk of evidence against us to produce, with all hopes of buttressing the shaky structure raised so far.

Inderpal still looked sentimentally attached to his deceased comrade and leader, Pandit Bhagwati Charan, who was the originator of the plan to rescue S. Bhagat Singh and his companions, and it would have been carried out but for his unexpected death. Originally it was intended to rescue all the accused in the Bhagat Singh conspiracy but the plan had to be modified later on because it was found practicable to rescue S. Bhagat Singh and B. K. Dutt only. A house at Bahawalpur Road was rented and Party men set to work there for the action planned by the Party. A new type of bomb was ready and Pandit Bhagwati Charan one evening set out in the company of Sukh Dev Raj and Vaishampayan, to carry out a test. The party reached the jungle near Ravi, a place very safe for the purpose. Pandit Bhagwati Charan took out the bomb and was about to throw it when it suddenly burst in his hand, because of the weakness of the trigger. A splinter struck Sukh Dev Raj in the foot. The terrific noise of the explosion had rung throughout the jungle and the outlying fields. Pandit Bhagwati Charan, supporting his badly torn stomach with his hand, told his comrades to depart. He was mortally wounded. It was useless to remain there as the police, in his opinion, were sure to arrive at the scene of the explosion. Darkness would set in within less than an hour. His companions tried to stem the flow of his blood, but in vain.

"I as your leader order you to go away!" cried the wounded revolutionary. Taking out his pistol from his pocket, he added, "I am yet alive and I know how to defend myself; you need have no fears about me, go!"

It was impossible for his companions to leave him to die alone in the wilderness. They would rather have died by his side. He was in the full possession of his reason and calmly argued with them over their vain sentimentalism. The injured foot of Sukh Dev Raj was swelling rapidly and in a few minutes it would not have been possible for him to walk even a few steps farther. Pandit Bhagwati Charan persuaded him to go. He had moreover to arrange for a first-aid party. They took Pandit Bhagwati Charan into the jungle, and laying his head on an earthen mound as his pillow, Vaishampayan ran to the river and brought water in his hat. The Pandit sipped the water, and asked them to go, assuring them that he was able to pull through the night.

Sukh Dev Raj departed for the city while Vaishampayan remained. The latter, too, had to make for the city, doubting whether Sukh Dev Raj could reach the place in time to bring a doctor. The condition of the Pandit was steadily getting worse!

“Carry on the work of the Party with double vigour if I die. Do not let the rescue plan suffer because of me.”

These words full of warmth and courage rang again and again into the ears of Vaishampayan as he was running fast towards the city. He knew what the life of Pandit Bhagwati Charan meant to the cause of the revolution and wanted to save him at all costs. He reached the Gawal Mandi *baithak* and asked Pandit Inderpal to organise a first-aid party as soon as possible. Pandit Rupchand, L. Kundan Lal and I were told to buy cotton wool, bandages, etc., and come with a *charpai* towards the river-side. Pandit Inderpal and Shiv went forward on bicycles. Shiv wanted to show Pandit Inderpal the place where the wounded comrade lay and then return to the city to arrange for a doctor to attend to the wound. It was entirely dark when Pandit Inderpal met us on the way. He led us through the jungle on the hardly visible path. We were nowhere nearer our destination, when the electric torch failed. Our search for the wounded comrade continued all through the night but he could not be found. The second party sent by Sukh Dev Raj reached the jungle early in the morning. Pandit Bhagwati Charan had meanwhile died. A temporary grave was dug on the outskirts of the jungle and the revolutionaries could not help shedding tears while laying the ablest and the most valiant of their comrades under a thin covering of earth. There was little hope of returning again to provide a better resting place for him.

Pandit Inderpal's narration of the above story was not a feelingless job, a mere repetition of evidential matter, but in the nature of a spirited tribute to the memory of the departed comrade whose sacrifice was not even known to all the members of the Party. The public only knew of his death from this statement of Pandit Inderpal in court. He had been a well-known figure in the political circles of Lahore, before he joined the Party. His wife, Mrs. Durga Bhagwati Charan, was also a declared absconder in our case.

Pandit Inderpal in the course of his statement further declared how the dead body of comrade Bhagwati Charan was later on exhumed by the police and the earth sifted for his bones to be produced as exhibits in court.

The evidence of Pandit Inderpal was in its concluding stage

when comrade Bhag Ram fell ill. He was liable to hysterical fits since his early youth and as Inderpal had told in the court, it was due to this trouble that the proposal for engaging him as the driver of the car which was to take the rescue party to the Central Jail was dropped. A fit coming upon him under extraordinary dangerous circumstances might have jeopardised the whole plan. He had had a few mild attacks since the day of his arrest and now they came frequently and lasted longer. One left him too weak to move from his bed for a day or two, after which he would try to regain the vivacity of spirit natural to him. Pathetically true, his efforts were in the nature of a compensatory activity of his sub-conscious self incited by some deep, abiding wound in the conscious. After a time there was no energy left in him for a boisterous mood.

An independent nature he had, that led him all his life from place to place without allowing him to live and work anywhere at the cost of his self-respect. He had tried many a trade, learnt many a useful work, and in his journeys from place to place come to understand the people of the country and the conditions under which they lived. He had listened to the call of our country in chains, and had as the result of a desperate bid to achieve her freedom, lost his own. Though of an indulgent and amiable disposition, he could not submit to humiliating conditions of existence. "The jail is the place where the worst indignities were offered to man," Pandit Chandrashekhar Azad used to say. The best that according to him could happen in the life of a revolutionary was to die fighting rather than be arrested and sent to prison. Bhag Ram was smarting under the pain of the yoke newly saddled upon him. The stupid and inhuman restrictions on his liberty were sorely trying to him in his feeble state of health.

I had known him outside to be a tireless worker, the type who entirely forgot themselves in their work. He would take five or six packets of cigarettes and go on working for hours, even days, in a corner of a Party house, unmindful of all necessities of life. In jail the work and the cigarettes were replaced by a feeling of helpless dependence upon the prison authorities, upon his friends and relatives outside. The crowning misfortune was the attitude of the Superintendent, who was also the medical officer of the jail, in taking him to be a malingerer and not a genuine case of hysteria. It was in his opinion only a "butter-and-milk-and-eggs" case. He would enquire without taking interest in the illness of Bhag Ram, "What do you require? Fruits? Meat?

More butter? Make me a request and I shall comply with it on medical grounds." Bhag Ram was cut to the quick at each and every piece of irony implicit in such questions. Fits came more often and with greater intensity. Bhag Ram was attended to by us at such moments and we knew what a severe shaking every fit meant to him, but the Superintendent would neither believe in Bhag Ram's complaint nor in our testimony as to his real condition. He would shake his head and say, "O no! It is nothing!"

Malingering is not unusual in the prison, but it was the duty of the medical officer to find out the truth in every case. The generally unsympathetic attitude of the Superintendent toward the "dangerous" class of prisoners to which we belonged stood in the way of his closely observing Bhag Ram's condition. We were, perhaps all of us, unreasonable, anti-government, anti-British maniacs to him, and this prejudiced view seemed to be another difficulty in the way of his standing on reasonable grounds with us. He always showed a disinclination to talk with any of us on his parade day, though we knew his attitude towards ordinary prisoners was different. He was, to be fair to him, not so stiff-necked an official as he appeared to be, but his prejudices against the politicals made him always look so.

Bhag Ram's health deteriorated more and more and he was taken from our ward to a room in the jail hospital, where none of us could either see him or show any resentment at the indifferent treatment of the medical authorities regarding his illness. What was the purpose of sending him to the hospital except segregation, when the Superintendent said he was only faking illness? Bhag Ram found that the attitude of the medical staff had undergone a change for the worse. As a protest he refused to be represented by his counsel in his absence and informed the court accordingly. The court remained closed for two or three days and then the jail authorities began to take him there on a stretcher. His bed was placed beside our enclosure and he would lie on it, sometimes conscious, sometimes in a state of coma under a fit, while the proceedings of the court went on. He informed the judges that he was not in a fit state of health to pay attention to what was going on in the court. The Superintendent of the jail was called to acquaint the court with the condition of his health and he testified to the "fact" that there was nothing wrong with him.

The judges, however, knew that a single court-day without business meant the expenditure of more than a thousand rupees

to the Government and that the persistence of the Superintendent, rightly or wrongly, in his medical opinion was sure to result in the obstruction of normal court proceedings, so they put pressure on Lala Sham Lal our counsel, to persuade the accused to agree to his representation *in absentia*. Lala had a talk with us and then submitted on our behalf that the judges as well as any layman could see that the accused was not in a fit state of health to understand fully the significance of the evidence being recorded by the court and to give instructions regarding that to the counsel for the defence. Our spokesman then informed the court with what seriousness we viewed the case of our ailing comrade. We wished the court proceedings to go on uninterrupted but there was no other course for us than to join Bhag Ram in his protest if the medical authorities persisted in their callous attitude. The court expressed their inability to interfere in the matter concerning the opinion of the medical authority and again asked Lala Sham Lal to use his persuasion with us. They told him that the only alternative for the Government would be to pass an Ordinance dispensing with the presence of the accused in person at their trial. We said we were prepared to withdraw our representation and let the court carry on the one-sided farce if they chose that way.

The judges had on our request themselves seen the condition of Bhag Ram, who lost his ability to move his limbs. They could at least know that he was in an extremely weak state of health. They had previously seen him succumb to hysterical fits. They found it hard to disregard his statement that he was not in a fit state of *mind* to pay attention to evidence. The court was adjourned to give time to Lala Sham Lal to find some way out of the difficulty.

We put forward two demands, the first for the proper treatment of our sick comrade; and the second for his medical examination by a *vaid* or a doctor not in Government service. The judges conceded the second demand and also promised to see what they could do to ensure proper medical aid for Bhag Ram. The deadlock was thus solved by the reasonable attitude of both the parties.

Within a few days Pandit Thakur Dutt Multani, a renowned *vaid* of Lahore, was called to the court to examine Bhag Ram and report on his condition. After a careful examination he testified before the court that he might not be able in his present state of extreme weakness, to apply his mind to the proceedings in the court even when not under the influence of a hysterical fit.

Bhag Ram had already withdrawn his objection, so the court went on recording evidence for some days more after which they adjourned for the summer recess.

We had tried all legal methods of protest and pressure for the redress of the grievance regarding our ailing comrade's medical treatment, but to no effect. His condition grew worse and though none of us was allowed to visit him in the hospital, we knew that he had become well-nigh paralytic. He managed to send us word that he was thinking of resorting to hunger-strike. We called a meeting and after a brief consultation declared a hunger-strike from next day on, demanding Bhag Ram's return to our ward, better treatment of sick persons and redress of other grievances relating to the treatment in general by the jail officers.

Lala Sham Lal intervened and the officiating Superintendent accepted our demands after we had been on hunger-strike for twelve days. Lalaji was himself present at the time of our breaking the fast. Bhag Ram was brought back to us a skeleton, able to tremble and shiver but unable to move. Death glared out of his eyes. In his extremity, he looked like a stranger. We felt we might yet be able to save him. There was his helplessness besides our own. We were none the less happy that he had come back to us. He too could not but be happy. We flocked around him and felt an indescribable satisfaction on seeing him sip slowly out of a cup the fruit juice provided to break his fast. Lala Sham Lal then told him that the officiating Superintendent had promised to treat him sympathetically. He had also agreed to give us some facilities such as that of allowing us to walk in the jail garden for an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening. The humiliating conditions laid down regarding our interviews were to be removed as far as possible. Lalaji bade us to be happy and we let him successfully fight out the case for us. He then took his leave. He was perhaps the happiest of all at the conclusion of this unwanted struggle.

After some days the Superintendent came back from leave and the officiating Superintendent had to go. The latter's promises had to be made good by the former. He consented to arrange for the services of a dentist for some of us whose teeth required filling and other treatment. One day we were informed that the

terrorist. His flushed cheeks and conspicuously swollen black eye-pits bespoke a heavy drinker. Casting a defiant look at me, he stood up and ordered me to open my mouth. I did so showing him the affected gums and teeth. I thought he would first examine my teeth and then suggest some treatment. All of a sudden I felt a vigorous pull at my jaw accompanied by a sensation of something breaking out of it. I did not feel pain at once; a molar perfectly healthy and sound had been taken out! I had asked him to fill the cavities of my teeth but instead a molar, not at all diseased, was extracted!

He expressed surprise when I told him what he had done and demanded to let him see the decayed tooth. He took that out in a moment without even my knowledge. My face was upturned, so I could not see what instrument he had picked up from the table, and while I thought he was examining my teeth he had made an attempt at another sound tooth. I felt a severe pain in my jaw, and receding a little told the dentist in an exasperated mood, "Either you are a quack, or you are doing mischief deliberately." He frowned like a tommy given a kick for some misbehaviour. I went out of the office room.

My comrades waiting for the dentist met me on the way and I told them what sort of a dentist he was. They became thoughtful and suspicious. Sewa Ram offered to see through the matter. He again acquainted himself with the details of my experience before he went.

We were eagerly waiting for his return. The day was marked for novel experiences, no doubt. He told us, "I went there and saw a fat man exasperated and frowning. There is more of a police inspector in him than a dentist. I bet he is an habitual drunkard. He measured me with his eyes from head to foot and ordered, 'Open your mouth!' in a rough voice. I only half opened my mouth. 'Open it fully,' he ordered. I did so without fully turning up my face, so as to see what he did. He inserted his fingers in my mouth. I felt he was going to pull my tooth and at once closed my jaws, thus biting his finger before he could take it out. He made a jerk with his hand and had in an instant caught hold of a syringe and poked its needle in my abdomen. I caught at the syringe but could not snatch it away because his grip was very strong. I have brought the needle with me. Here it is. . . ."

We looked at the needle and laughed heartily. There was fun enough in the dentist who might have been taken for a veterinary doctor but for the knowledge we obtained later that he

was the only dental surgeon in Government service in the whole of the province. The Superintendent had called in the most experienced dentist for us, though he was previously unwilling to hire the services of even an ordinary one and had only been forced to yield because of our repeated requests backed by propaganda in the court and in the local newspapers against the indifferent attitude of the medical authorities. The Superintendent had, however, to all appearance informed the dentist not only about the dental treatment we required, but also about what he thought about us. How could a new man have played his part so admirably without any prompting?

The remaining comrades requiring dental treatment continued to look much bloated in their cheeks for a couple of days and presented an interesting sight to the occupants of Ward No. 14 Old.

CHAPTER 16

"THOUGHTS SHAPE THE DESTINY OF MAN!"

THE court reopened after the recess. We were rather eagerly waiting for the day when we would be able to enjoy our daily newspaper and have a chat with L. Sham Lal. Notwithstanding the lack of interest in the legal aspect of the case, the place had quite a few attractions for us. Seeing the multitude of busy men, coming and going, standing on duty, or sitting as visitors in the visitors' gallery, was like enjoying the air of freedom, which we felt we had been missing for the last month and a half.

I had a mind to raise many controversial issues when we had an opportunity of a heart-to-heart talk with L. Sham Lal after the early rising of the court, but forgot to do so, and inviting criticism asked instead, "What was wrong with the revolutionaries?"

Lalaji was the only defence counsel who took interest in our beliefs and ideas and felt pleasure in sharing argument with us on the question of the method by which the independence of our country was to be achieved. Our social meeting, taking place at least once a week, amounted to our gathering around Lalaji and

bombarding him with questions which had hardly anything to do with our defence.

"What do you mean?" inquired Lalaji, a bit surprised, not at the question but at the seriousness with which I had asked it.

I said revolutionaries do not resort to violence for violence's sake but because it was productive of swift results and thus preferable to the slow-affecting method of non-violence. Supposing I was correct in this analysis, what other objection was there to our method?

"It is not simply violence," he replied with the serenity natural to a man used to resolving contradictions, "It is the ephemeral character of violence, its inability to remain at the same pitch for long, that distinguishes your actions. You flare up into activity, the duration of which is essentially short. Non-violence on the other hand is the philosophy suitable for all times since it implies sustained effort."

"Soldiers like brisk actions and then peace," put in Pandit Rupchand, and I backed him by saying, "We can't ignore the psychology of the young men who bear the brunt of the battle. They can't be expected to be profound thinkers under the circumstances, demanding prompt and vigorous action."

"Had the police not caught us, we would have kept up a sustained effort too," was another forceful assertion.

"For a couple of months more," retorted Lalaji, good humouredly, adding, "a terrorist always finds himself in a blind alley in less than two years of active life. The police inevitably bring his activities to a standstill; do you deny that?"

"Another comes and takes charge of his work," remarked one of us.

"The work never suffers unless the pressing conditions cease to exist," said I.

Conscious of the educative value of non-violence as a moral principle for mankind I never made a frontal attack on it as a creed. The safe course with a skilful logician like Lalaji was to go on extolling our own view without directly opposing his. The question always boiled down to this: "Could we through violence force the hands of the British rulers more swiftly or not?" He never ruled out the possibility, but in the view of a true Gandhite like him, "Independence through violent means was not a desirable thing." We always strongly differed from him on this point.

One truth was undeniable. The life that he lived, that is, his deeds and not his words, bore out the reality that devotees of

non-violence could be as capable of sacrifice as those believing in violence. Usually the arguments were never conclusive. His views were deserving of respect because his actions were in conformity with them. Truth and non-violence, not in accordance with the realities of the world, as we understood them required the visionary touch in their devotees, and to that extent he was a visionary. His principle was that everyone should act according to one's faith. He never tried to force his views on others.

My question had not been fully answered and I followed it up with the issue of racial hatred. "Has violence anything to do with inciting of racial antagonism between men of different races when they stand in violent opposition to one another?" I asked, with the attitude of the Superintendent of the jail at the background of my thoughts.

Lalaji was interested in finding out whether we hated anyone on racial grounds or not.

One or two said, "Yes," others replied with a categorical "No"!

He was visibly pleased over this answer and said that one race was naturally interested in the other and that there was no ground for hatred even when the question of exploitation came in between them, if people only knew the way of non-violence.

"I admit," I said, "that the British have no need to hate as long as they can fleece us. We cannot charge them with racial hatred against us though it is plain they could not rule us without the feeling of racial superiority which in reality means nothing more than their being industrially more advanced than ourselves, but the trouble arises when we oppose their exploitation by violent or even non-violent means. What I want to know is whether it is merely our violence that creates hatred in them whenever it exists."

"Violence leaves more painful memories behind and for this reason is solely to be discarded as a means for obtaining political ends," replied Lalaji briefly without touching upon the psychological effect of a non-violent struggle upon the opposite party. He had in fact given us material for further reflection upon the subject.

Lalaji was spending a considerable sum of money out of what he earned as our senior counsel on our requirements such as books, magazines, articles of food, etc., and after defraying the expenses of his household gave the rest to the Congress funds. He was day and night busy scanning papers, preparing for cross-examination of witnesses, consulting law books and never think-

ing of even a single day of rest in spite of his steadily declining health. He was not the man to raise the structure of our defence on false alibis and untruths pitted against the untruths of the prosecution, but was rather prepared to admit our complicity in general in the conspiracy, leaving it to the other party to prove each one's individual part. Justice in his view became injustice when it was unfairly obtained, and he was planning a general onslaught on the methods adopted by the investigating police officials. False witnesses were to be produced to relate true events, true witnesses were being trained to give exaggerated statements, and much light had been thrown on these unfair tactics by Pandit Inderpal. Lalaji had impressed the court with his natural aptitude for fair-play and justice and gained their respect. He was the same noble soul with everybody. A mighty confluence of divergent natures had taken place around his being, a great unification of contradictory elements had come into force, making him simple, easy and naturally nearer to everybody.

"Can you never, never believe even for once in violence?" was the question put to him one day though not for the first time.

"Never," he replied with a great question-mark-like smile writ large over his features. He looked well contented with the single word "never" spoken without emphasis.

"How did you come to defend us when you consider our method wrong and foolish?" asked one of us.

Through another broad smile came his reply: "Because even the sacrifice of fools has its value when the cause is a worthy one!"

We laughed without being discomfited. Taking the argument further, I enquired, "Did you not take into consideration the possibility that we or the like of us might feel encouraged in the methods of folly by your sympathetic attitude towards us?"

He told us with perfect equanimity that he had not come without the idea of reforming us all!

"Or else be reformed by us?"

"Yes, yes! I am open to your influence. Try!" said he goodnaturedly.

Optimistic like all men of faith, he nevertheless knew as a lawyer that convictions in most of the cases were inevitable. The second approver Shiv Ram had finished with his evidence and his younger brother Saran Das the third approver, had begun. Shiv Ram had nothing important to say against us but was produced first in the court because of his reliability as a sure tool in the hands of the police, which fact was meant to influence

the weak and wavering next witness, Saran Das, who had to give a more relevant piece of evidence concerning the activities of the Party. Both fully supported the prosecution, making significant changes in their former statements before the magistrates only where the complicity of one of the accused, Krishan Gopal of Rawalpindi, in the conspiracy was concerned.

Our social meetings with Lalaji continued, with the issue of violence or non-violence still undecided. It was in fact never to be decided in his lifetime. He had nevertheless succeeded in bringing us to a clearer understanding of the Gandhian principles about which we had been previously in the dark.

We would sometimes ask Lalaji to make guesses about the sentences each one of us was likely to get. He was a great lawyer but describing a picture before it was made was hardly possible for him. Why ask him when we knew for certain that the picture would not be beautiful and must bear some blood spots on it? But we were not more rational than the simple folk who show their hands to commonplace astrologers only conversant with the art of telling what people usually like to be told. "What if the majority of you get from three to five years each! I am concentrating my efforts on preventing death sentences and, God willing, I shall succeed," he would say.

He had already succeeded in obtaining discharge orders for two of us, namely, Dharam Pal of Kangra and Harnam Singh of Sheikhpura. Bishan Das, Sirdar Singh and Maharaj Krishan had been one by one enlarged upon bail. This was no small success for a lawyer in a case such as ours.

One of the junior counsel, Mehta Amar Nath, had been ailing for about six months and was unable to work. His place was taken by Lala Faqir Chand Mittal of Rohtak, who was a relative of Lala Sham Lal.

There had been some family feud or other cause keeping both the families wide apart, but Lalaji chose Mr. Mittal for his ability and worth as a lawyer without giving any thought to the strained relations existing between the two families, and his choice proved to be the best. Mr. Mittal put tremendous energy and zeal into the defence work and was of great help to Lala Sham Lal.

CHAPTER 17

MORE OF THE KING'S EVIDENCE

AFTER Saran Das came Khairati Ram, son of Lala Radha Shah, a well-known millowner of Shahdara. This approver was like an unnecessary outgrowth having no function to perform while he was outside, but happened to acquire a puffed-up importance after his arrest. More loyal than the King himself, he gained a new individuality and a privileged position in the records of the prosecution. According to the latter, he had accompanied Hans Raj "Wireless" and Rupchand to Lyallpur, and come back without doing anything. He had seen these two revolutionaries depart for Lyallpur, had seen them getting out of the train, had heard that they were to hire a house in that city and place bombs there; they had walked on the roads meeting several people who were later on to be connected with the bomb outrage at Lyallpur. The comedy of the part played by him in the prosecution drama was that he had no part except that of a sightseer. He became an approver, an achievement due to the best efforts and influence of his well-to-do relatives, and remained for about three years in the jail until the day of judgment in our case, whereas he would have been set free earlier by the police before the trial or later on by the court at the very beginning of the trial, because there was nothing even like a plausible charge against him. It seems that an inspiration came upon him to entrain for Lyallpur one day and go on observing the activities of certain people till he thought it fit to return home.

One obvious fact questioning the veracity of his evidence was that his statements before the police and the magistrate were exactly identical in every respect. Was his memory so perfect as to allow no possibility of the slightest difference in the wording of the two statements given to two different authorities on different occasions with an interval of several weeks between them? Lala Sham Lal, trying to ascertain the truth in the matter, asked during his cross-examination of the witness,

"Did you give both these statements?"

"Yes!"

Lalaji took a copy of his statement and began to read aloud his description of my features. He then asked Khairati Ram to

repeat from memory the items of my physiognomy in the same order in which they were just described before him. The witness proved a hopeless failure.

Madan Gopal, the fifth and the last of the approvers, gave a resounding rebuff to the expectations of the police officers by producing out of his boots certain papers given him to memorise. In addition to this he made startling allegations against the police officers in charge of the investigation, which were similar in character to those made by Pandit Inderpal.

The approvers were kept in the Borstal Jail under the strictest watch and ward possible, in complete seclusion from the rest of the prison inmates. They could not communicate with or see anybody from inside or outside the jail without the permission of the C.I.D., the only authority for allowing interviews. The latter had taken every precaution to keep the approvers "whole," not losing the value they were meant to have for the prosecution. Any prisoner seen shouting or talking aloud within hearing distance of the approvers' enclosure was liable to be punished. Madan Gopal was thoroughly searched before being brought to the court, but to the surprise of the C.I.D. officers, he took out a suspicious-looking paper and began to flaunt its contents in their face. They were too angry to see the *raison d'être* of Madan Gopal's action, too flurried to look dispassionately at this example of the intricacies of human nature.

Their wrath against him was vented upon us. The police Inspector who took charge of us from the jail authorities at the wall gate underwent a sudden change of attitude and began to search us in so humiliating a fashion that we felt ashamed and insulted. We were searched twice by the jail officers before reaching the wall gate from our ward. The third search was carried out by the police at the jail side of the gate and the fourth at the court side. The treatment of the police became rough and harsh and animosity glared out of the Inspector's eyes at his every meeting with us. He would threaten us with his cane when we objected to the new method of search. On several occasions he threatened us with lathi-charge and even shooting, alleging discourteous remarks against himself by one or two of us. One day the court had to intervene in order to pacify him. All of us had now begun to attend the court regularly and the tension between us and the police continued to increase. The police did not relax in spite of the instructions of the court to behave with moderation and propriety at the time of carrying out searches. We could not bear the degrading treatment to

which we were submitted several times a day and decided to come to the court in loin-cloths only.

The *Milap* of Lahore published the news about this unprecedented form of protest with the following couplet well-expressive of the sentiments of a primitive caveman:—

تن کی غریانی سے بہتر ہی ہین کوئی لباس
یہ وہ جامہ ہے کہ جکا نہین الٹا سیرھا

Our protest continued for more than a fortnight, while the season was becoming colder and colder. The police decided to yield at last, and a conciliatory attitude was adopted by them.

Pandit Jwala Parshad, the Public Prosecutor, might have entertained notions very different from those we had about the form of our protest, but he expressed much satisfaction at the conclusion of an unnecessary struggle.

One day some of us happened to observe the Public Prosecutor's junior at close quarters and came back one by one to our enclosure, nudging others to go and see. There was something, rather a great thing, which had filled us with uncontrollable laughter. Next day Pandit Rupchand had a poem of considerable descriptive value ready, and was indiscreet enough to show it to Pandit Jwala Parshad, the man of literary parts. Strangely enough, the latter said nothing by way of appreciation, but instead requested us to be as familiar with him as we liked, but spare his junior. We agreed.

Important witnesses bearing upon the main action of simultaneous bomb-outrages were now produced one by one. We learnt from the statements of some of them that the police brought them from their homes two or three days earlier than their day of evidence and lodged them in the Lahore Fort or in a portion of the Australia Building specially hired for the purpose and had made special arrangements for them till their business in the court was finished. They were meanwhile not allowed to move freely and meet persons of their choice. It was not unexpected under the circumstances, that an overwhelming majority of "independent" witnesses fully supported the case for the prosecution. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that they gave evidence under duress. A small minority, however, was coura-

geous enough to speak the truth in spite of all the coaching and coaxing and threats of the police.

We also had another singular experience when identification of the accused became a matter of daily occurrence. We were made to stand in a line whenever a witness had to identify a particular accused. Complete strangers succeeded in identifying us without the slightest hesitation. No doubt we had been shown to the witnesses several times while under police custody, but that was a matter of about a year and a half before, and we had forgotten many faces seen in those days, so that the chance of a mistake by others in recognising us was of course there. One day we changed the order in which we were standing in line, just when a witness stepped out of the dock to have a look at us. The accused formerly standing fifth in the line was to have been identified but he had changed his place. The witness pointed out with his finger the comrade who was now number five, and replied "yes," "yes" when the court asked him twice: "Is he the man?"

This experience was repeated several times and proved beyond doubt that a trick was being played upon us. One or two of us actually saw a police officer making signs with his fingers to a witness and the matter was reported to the judges but they said they had seen nothing.

Two old priests of Brahm-Akhara, Gujranwala, the place of occurrence of the bomb-outrage wherein a police officer had been killed, were the most important eye-witnesses in the whole of the case, and they were taught their "lesson" with special care and effort—a very incongruous thing in the case of these men who had all their lives preached righteousness and truth. One of them, Mohkam Chand by name, was asked by the court to identify the two accused (Amrik Singh and myself) whom he had mentioned in his statements. The priest came to our line and passed in front of us a few times and said he could not identify either of them. Mr. Blacker, the President, and R. S. Ganga Ram were of the view that the witness was deliberately avoiding looking at the two of us and put a note to this effect in the record. The third judge, Mr. Sleem, did not form such an opinion. He put this question to the witness:

"Mohkam Chand! If we show you the real accused, would you be able to identify them?"

The witness said he would try to. Amrik Singh and I were asked to stand up. He continued looking closely at us for a while and then said, "Yes, these are the very persons the police

told me were the real culprits."

At this juncture the President expressed his willingness to expunge the remarks recorded about the witness a few minutes earlier, if Lala Sham Lal did not object, but Lalaji objected and the remarks remained on record.

The Public Prosecutor declared the witness hostile and sought the permission of the court to cross-examine him. The witness replying to questions put to him by the Public Prosecutor said that he had identified the two persons who were shown to him during the police investigation, from behind a curtain in the verandah of Akbari Mandi Police Station.

The second priest of Brahm-Akhara corroborated the first. He also told about his seeing us from behind a curtain in the Akbari Mandi Police Station.

The Dental Surgeon who had once attended us in the jail Superintendent's office, appeared as prosecution witness in our case as well as in the supplementary case of Sukh Dev Raj. He had examined a broken jaw said to have been Bhagwati Charan's and alleged to have been broken by a splinter from a bomb.

"I am certain the man whose jaw it was died because of the broken jaw," asserted the witness.

Sukh Dev Raj, himself cross-examining him asked, "Are you certain that the broken jaw caused his death?"

"Yes, I am certain," repeated the witness.

"How can you be so sure in this opinion?"

"I am the authority on matters concerning human teeth."

The more he was questioned the more firm he became in this assertion. Sukh Dev Raj confronted him with the testimony of the Civil Surgeon of the Mayo Hospital to the effect that the person had died because of a big wound in his abdomen, and then asked,

"Do you think the Civil Surgeon was wrong in his opinion?"

"Yes! He was wrong. I am the only authority on bones in the whole of the Province and my opinion is that he died of the broken jaw," insisted the witness.

He little knew that he was not helping as he thought but spoiling the prosecution case by obstinately sticking to his opinion. The prosecution story, as already told, was that Bhagwati Charan was mortally wounded in the abdomen and asked his two companions to return to the city. How could he speak, as the Dental Surgeon would have liked the court to believe, with his jaw broken?

and the Public Prosecutor was in a great measure due to the salutary influence of Lala Sham Lal over all who came in contact with him. Always cheerful, always optimistic, he steered the course of our destiny with a heavy burden upon his shoulders and with a wealth of good-will for everybody in his heart. We loved him, the judges respected him, and those on the side of the prosecution admired him for his qualities of head and heart. An outstanding Congress leader in the Province, he was a veteran soldier in the cause of freedom, who had suffered imprisonment in various struggles the Congress had launched. It was characteristic of him not to let his legal genius employ falsehood and hypocritical language in proving our innocence. He always preferred to argue on the basis of our inherent right to struggle for the independence of our country. He tried to expose the unfair and reprehensible tactics of the police resorted to during the investigation of the case and he pleaded for our acquittal on the grounds of doubtful evidence that had been produced in connection with various actions with which we were individually and collectively charged.

Long overwork had greatly taxed his energies and he broke down in health. His foot had been lately swollen with gout, giving him much pain. He was hardly able to move about but would not agree to take rest for a single day.

He had filed an application in the High Court on behalf of Sukh Dev Raj, but the latter wanted to withdraw it as it was to be heard by Mr. Justice Broadway in whom he had no faith. Lalaji prayed for the withdrawal, according to the instructions given him by his client, adducing the reason that the latter had wanted him to give on his behalf.

Mr. Justice Broadway took it as a slight and called upon Lala Sham Lal to show cause why he should not be prosecuted for contempt of court. The law of those days provided unlimited powers to the High Court to sentence to any length of imprisonment a person found guilty of contempt of court. Lalaji had to appear on the date fixed by the judge to answer the charge. He explained to us the implications of the case against him which might mean an indefinite period of imprisonment. He would not be in a position to defend our case if convicted. To express unqualified regret—apparently the only way out of the difficulty—for what was considered by him not an offence but an honest carrying out of his duty towards his client, would have been wholly insincere and incompatible with the high moral principles for which he always stood. There was no intention at all

of the slightest disrespect on his part, but for this very reason he owed no apology to the judge.

Lalaji asked our opinion in the matter. He would do anything for our sake, even tender an apology, in the interests of our defence, but it was the last thing we would ever think of. All of us whole-heartedly supported him in the dignified view he took in the matter and wanted him to stick to it, whatever the result. Lalaji was no doubt indispensable to us; no lawyer could replace him at this stage of our case, and his imprisonment would have meant a serious setback to the defence, but we did not mind.

He appeared on the appointed day before Mr. Justice Broadway, who asked him to express regret for what he had said on behalf of his client. Lalaji refused to do so on the grounds that he was within the bounds of legal propriety when he told the judge that his client had no faith in him. The judge pondered over the courageous and frank reply of Lalaji, and then decided to take a lenient view of the matter. The contempt of court charge was thus not pursued further.

The prosecution had produced their last witness and now the charges against us had to be framed. The President, cutting short an argument of Lala Sham Lal, inquired, "Well, Mr. Sham Lal, who else could have committed all these crimes if not the accused present here?" and Lalaji replied, "Sir, I do not claim that the accused are innocent; my contention on the other hand is that the court has to sift carefully the doubtful evidence which has become more doubtful because of the falsehoods and exaggerations mixed up in it; the forgeries alleged to have been committed by certain police officers according to the deposition of the approvers Inderpal and Madan Gopal are to be reckoned with. . . ."

Lalaji made a spirited attack on the methods adopted by some police officers during the investigations and in this he was on perfectly justifiable ground; but knowing the truth of a matter and proving it to the full satisfaction of a third party critical of the contentions of either of the two disputants over an issue, are not the same thing, and Lalaji could hardly stress the point further.

We had to give our statements before the framing of charges. There were those who wanted to admit their part in the conspiracy and honourably and frankly express their views about terrorism. Others thought differently. We had had prolonged discussions amongst ourselves, wherein the legal group took a

active part against those who were in favour of open confession. Our views were considered insufficient for lack of legal opinion. It was decided at last that we should take counsel with Lal Sham Lal and his juniors before coming to a final conclusion. Apart from moral considerations, the strictly legal view that we obtained was that what we might confess would be taken as undeniable facts in the case, and what we might deny, as weak points, especially sorted out of the prosecution story. Another point made clear to us was the impossibility of our being able to impress the judges with truthfulness in our character. One of the junior counsel opined that the only result of the confessions by some of us would be to bolster up the white lies of the police as glaring truths. Our lawyers, especially Lalaji, had nothing to say against any step we might feel morally bound to take. There were those amongst us whose part in the whole conspiracy was quite insignificant but they had every chance of long sentences if confession by others were decided upon. There was no moral in bringing about the punishment on mere sympathisers and well-wishers of the revolutionaries. We held further discussions and decided to deny the charges.

I filed a written statement admitting my being a revolutionary and gave views of a general nature without referring to any particular acts of mine which had resulted from those views.

The charges of murder, abetment of murder, dacoity, keeping and using of dangerous explosives, etc., were framed against us. We knew that the failure of certain witnesses under cross-examination and the discrepancies in their statements, the courageous upholding of truth by some, etc., were matters that had impressed us only and not the judges, who as a rule were impressed without paying much attention to details. What we considered to be instances of grave interference with justice were mere flaws of police procedure unfit for any serious study by the court. We felt they had come to regard us as guilty. The rest did not matter. What Pandit Inderpal had told against us was unmixed truth, and what he did not, an omission deliberate or otherwise. There were other witnesses to fill in the gaps left by him. A judge could believe a small part of some evidence as true and discard the rest as false. If there were twelve witnesses of an incident, eleven of whom were proved to be wholly unreliable, the judge could still sentence an accused relying solely on the evidence of the twelfth. This was knowing something of the way the mind of the judges worked.

So much for the legal view in which we had hardly any

interest. The reality had been long foreseen by us through a different process of reasoning. This conspiracy case, in our view, was but a continuation of our fight against the foreigners in control of our destiny, against the moral degradation of those custodians of law and order who never missed a chance of proving their loyalty by resorting to excessive use of force against our unarmed, struggling masses. The moral of all morals for a revolutionary was to keep burning the fire of revolution. Our case was but a part of the struggle. We stood by our duty, each according to the circumstances of his case. The Government were exercising their right of trying, punishing, suppressing us ; our Party outside had exercised the right to revolt, it had asked the youth of the country to make use of this right to the best of their ability. We were here because the freedom of our country had become a live issue for us. The slave-owners never admitted the right of the slaves to rebel. Our imperialist exploiters measured the violent and non-violent opposition to their exploitation with the same rod. Legitimate and peaceful movements had been met with organised brutality ; the non-violent army of *Satyagraha* had nothing but lathi-charges and bullets to face. Had our rulers differentiated between the violent and non-violent methods, they would have been in a better moral position to condemn our activities. They had the power but not the moral right to punish us. Our trial served the purpose of focussing public attention on the issue of violence ; it was what we had always been aiming at. We had never been in favour of violence unless absolutely necessary ; non-violence carried to the extent of a fad was even more undesirable. In the mean was the cold logic of a relentless struggle. This was one of the lessons every participant in the struggle had to learn sooner or later. We claimed reason on our side and felt duty-bound to deny the charge against us of unlicensed, unprincipled violence with criminal motives.

We were free to think but not to act. The conditions in the prison were fundamentally different from those outside. Studies, discussions, and the thirst for useful political knowledge were our main concern now. The practical life had begun to drink deep from theory ; an armed conflict had given place to a fight in which ideas played the main part. The change-over from the physical to the mental plane was not a set-back at all. The coming convictions were no bar to our mental growth, the certainty of some death-sentences encumbered no one's thoughts. Expecting no leniency from the law, the chief object of which was to maintain our slavery, and cherishing no hope which might weaken

our resolve to carry on the struggle, were the signs of a rising wave of enthusiasm. Life in those days was really too wonderful to be depicted in terms of logic and fact.

We had at the outset expected no smooth sailing but conflict with the court at every step in our trial. The experience in the first conspiracy case had been no less an example before the Government than with us. The memory of the martyrs had come to stay and affect friend and enemy alike though in a different fashion. Many an invidious mistake had not been repeated by the Government; the judges too were conscious of showing no prejudice, and the emissary of truth and non-violence, Lala Sham Lal, had come upon the scene to act as inevitable peacemaker for us, so no major conflict was allowed to develop. On the first few days of our trial, we might have appeared to the judges as fanatic cut-throats, from the ideological viewpoint, as they had seemed to us like bigoted law-twisters, but there had been a gradual, persistent dawning of the truth on all parties, with the exception of the police, who had apparently no interest in the human aspect of the drama wherein the judged and the judges had an equal part. That all were men with limitations of views, duties, congenial aims, was to them a truth worth assimilating though the process might be slow.

Re-cross-examination of prosecution witnesses, defence witnesses, and the arguments and counter-arguments for summing up the case of both sides took a year more before the final judgment was pronounced.

Bhag Ram had meanwhile become a total wreck in health, a dead loss to the prosecution. The Superintendent-cum-Medical Officer of the jail still held the view that he was a malingerer. He had been examined by several medical men in Government service but only one doctor from the Mental Hospital of Lahore had given an opinion to the effect that it was a case of hysteria, whereas all others had confirmed the Superintendent's view. Bhag Ram had become a paralytic, and was slowly but surely nearing his death. The case against him was withdrawn, but he was not set free. The police came to take him away to Gujrat Jail where he was confined as a State prisoner. He remained there for some months and was then transferred to Rawalpindi District Jail. They set him at liberty at last but he did not live to see another day. It was like letting off the naked flame into the open to receive an unfailing buffet of the wind. They cut the roots and the reed stood for a moment on a thread-like remnant, and then fell crashing to the ground. They had been waiting,

waiting, and took this timely action when his death became certain!

The Sub-Assistant Surgeon of the jail, who accompanied him from Rawalpindi on his last journey to his home at Jammu, was later on transferred to our jail. We learnt from him that Bhag Ram had breathed his last a few hours after reaching Jammu in the evening. He had attended upon him to the last and was deeply affected by the tragedy. He further disclosed that there were standing orders to release him only when his death became imminent. He died because he was a revolutionary. He died because he was called a malingerer. Every attitude on the Government side contributed to his death. Could even the sacrifice of his life prove that he was really ill? Perhaps not! It was typical of the reasoning of those in power. A deadly unreason they had, so far as the revolutionaries were concerned.

CHAPTER 19

THE JUDGMENT

OUR case had not yet ended. Many of the defence witnesses had during their statements thrown light on the measures adopted by the police to terrorise people into giving evidence against us. They told how the prosecution witnesses lodged in the Lahore Fort or the Australia Building were made to feel the power and influence of the police. They related tales of the high-handedness of the investigating officers. Some of the defence witnesses were men who had themselves been arrested within a few days of the bomb-outrages in six different places. In some instances the cases prepared against them on the basis of extorted confessions were about to begin in courts of law. There might have been convictions but for our arrest in the meanwhile. These were glaring examples of police methods. It was well-nigh impossible to produce proofs of police torture because they never beat any suspect in the presence of witnesses. Those who testified in our defence inevitably incurred the wrath of the police but they dared to tell the truth and braved risks in doing so.

The court again closed for the summer vacation. All was changed when it re-opened. The same judges who had been

lenient in view and generous in interpretation of the law became stiff and stern with the full consciousness of their duty to award punishment. We felt the change, especially in the attitude of the youngest judge, Mr. Sleem, who had always impressed us with his enlightened outlook. Pandit Jwala Parshad and Lala Sham Lal both argued and summed up their cases. The arguments of our defence counsel, including those formerly accepted by the judges, seemed to cut no ice now. The Public Prosecutor was happy that he had no need to argue much. The case was considered to be proved. The Tribunal adjourned to write the judgment. It was delivered on the 13th of December, 1933. R. S. Ganga Ram Soni read it aloud to us in his usual unfaltering, clear voice. The following sentences in brief were awarded:—

Gulab Singh.—Death sentence. Sentences of transportation for life and rigorous imprisonment amounting in aggregate to about 75 years.

Amrik Singh.—Death sentence.

Rupchand.—Transportation for life and rigorous imprisonment aggregating to about 75 years.

Jahangiri Lal.—Transportation for life and rigorous imprisonment aggregating to about 75 years.

Malik Kundan Lal.—Transportation for life and imprisonment aggregating to about 50 years.

Malik Nathu Ram.—7 years' rigorous imprisonment.

The ten remaining accused got from two to four years each.

Bishan Das of Rawalpindi who was on bail because of his illness had died recently.

Dharam Vir, Jai Parkash, Dianat Rai, Bansi Lal and Maharaj Krishan were set free. The rest had been discharged at different stages of the trial.

Sukh Dev Raj was awarded three years' rigorous imprisonment.

All the approvers were discharged by the court but the police arrested Pandit Inderpal in the court compound on the ground that he had detracted from his former statement and had thus forfeited the claim to pardon as King's witness. He was to face his trial for his part in the conspiracy. The police had already marked him as their enemy No. 1 when he had only half-begun his evidence in the court. Our hearts went out to him in sympathy for he had not agreed to become a tool of the police under the most trying circumstances in his life. He was subsequently sentenced to death.

The chapter of our trial was at an end. From now on prison

was to be our permanent abode. On this last day came all the high police officials concerned with the investigation or conduct of the case, our friends and relatives, and a large number of men and women from the city. We bade good-bye to Pandit Jwala Parshad, the legal genius behind the successful termination of the prosecution case, and the fact did not escape our notice that he was, unlike the police officers present, not so jubilant as he deservedly ought to have been.

"Shall we be able to obtain a very dissimilar judgment from the High Court?" inquired Dianat Rai, one of the released comrades.

"Not very much!" replied the learned Pandit sententiously. It was an honest and wise reply indeed.

Dianat Rai then put an awkward question to him without realising his duties as the counsel for the Crown.

"Will you insist upon the death sentences in the High Court?" he asked. The Public Prosecutor remained silent and contemplating the bundle of papers lying on the table in front of him, and answered after a while in a subdued voice, "My case is proved. I need not speak about the sentences!"

Lala Sham Lal was meanwhile busy with the judges who were finishing their business that day. He had requested them to recommend "B" class treatment for us and to instruct the jail authorities to let us remain in the Lahore Jail till the decision of our appeal. The judges, while making both the recommendations, remarked, "All these are well-behaved young men belonging to decent families and deserve better status!"

We had about an hour's interview with Lala Sham Lal, Lala Faqir Chand Mittal, Mr. Amolak Ram Kapur and Mehta Pran Nath, our defence counsel. They had assiduously applied themselves to the defence work for the past three years, and it was no mean success for these lawyers to have obtained the acquittal of about ten accused out of a total of twenty-seven. They were not worried over the short sentences, and Lala Sham Lal said he could secure more acquittals in the High Court by concentrating on the weak cases, but that was not what he was aiming at. The legal talk was followed by a lively conversation of a non-serious nature mostly centring round Lalaji's personality. He had been like a father to us and our relations with him were like those of grown-up children rather than of clients. The lawyers proposed to come for consultation about the appeal within a few days and bade us good-bye.

There were our relatives and friends who had come to hear the

judgment and we took leave of them too.

Dianat Rai, the most exuberant natured amongst all of us, hugged me closer and whispered in my ears, "What do you think of Pandit Jwala Parshad's words?"

The talkative little Dianat Rai was the youngest of all. I smiled at his question and told him by way of a parting word, "I am happy that you are free. I am also satisfied that most of us have got light sentences. The capital sentence is no burden on my mind and I can take it lightly. Be happy and try to cultivate moderation in place of your frequent launching into exaggerated attitudes."

The released comrades went out. The farewell over, we came out into the open courtyard. Here the police constables who had been on duty in the court for the last three years bade us good-bye. There were actually tears in the eyes of some of them. The wall gate opened to let us in. One of the police constables was shaking hands with one of us, when the European Inspector chanced to appear on the roof of the court building. He ordered the constable to lay down his belt then and there. We learnt later on that he was dismissed that very day because of the unpardonable offence of "shaking hands with murderers" like us. We deeply regretted this dismissal.

Inside the jail, we stood under the plum tree in front of the condemned cells, where a jail officer had been waiting to enter our names, sentences and other particulars in his register. The jail authorities knew beforehand what the judgment was but the warrants had not yet arrived. The officer was not a little uneasy about two of the condemned prisoners who were idly walking about in the jail garden, but he could not immediately order them into the condemned cells without legal authority.

We remained in the garden for about three hours enjoying the company which was to be had no more. My ideas were quite clear and unencumbered with emotion as if a cool wind were blowing over the fountain of my thoughts. I calmly went over the judgment in my mind and found nothing unexpected in it. I had in fact always expected it to be severer than it naturally was. The judges had shown leniency in cases where the charges were milder and treated the serious cases differently. It was the best attitude for them to adopt after coming to the conclusion that we were guilty. There had been a likelihood of Malik Kundan Lal and Pandit Rupchand also getting capital sentences but it was understood during the final arguments that they would be awarded transportation for life. To expect the worst and then

find the actual results better, is always a heartening process. I thought in retrospect how with the gradual lapse of time a change had come upon the judges, the police, the accused and others connected with our case. The recent remarks of the Public Prosecutor, were, to my mind, not expressive of his particular attitude towards death sentences, but of his general feeling of good-will towards all of us. Our long social contact, however formal, had resulted in a spirit of mutual understanding and accommodation. An illuminating example of this could be had in the court's intercession with the jail Superintendent for his allowing us certain facilities even when there was no legal authority to do so. They were not so obliging in the beginning when it was usually difficult to impress them with the genuineness of a complaint or the reasonableness of a request.

The reasons for the hardened attitude of the police officers were many. The foremost was their consciousness that our main action was directed against their class. I felt they had the notion, erroneous or otherwise, of having to contend with us always. Moreover, the character imparted to them by their organization urged upon them the necessity for ever keeping up a show of unlimited authority, terrible force and unremitting watchfulness. There was therefore no easing of the conflict for them even after our conviction was secured. In fact our action was not aimed at the police system as a whole but against those members of it who formed part of the gigantic machine which crushed the natural aspirations of our countrymen. Any lover of freedom might by way of protest against actions calculated to stop progress and safeguard tyranny, ask, "If the tyrant is justified in the use of force, why not the victim?" We did not merely ask the question but went a step further and actively joined the struggle against tyranny. The warm, fresh blood coursing through our veins inspired us to action. We struck the blow in the country's name, with the best of motives. To receive the counter-blow was in our programme, a duty amongst duties if we could but meet it with discipline and courage. My life seemed to have steadily and surely moved towards receiving a death sentence. Something within had always been urging me on and on; towards greater and greater utilisation of my energies. I had had the ever-increasing satisfaction of being on the right path and did not feel puzzled at all at the appearance of a breach in the road. The ditch that was formerly only on the map now stood before my eyes in reality and that was all I could feel about it!

My comrades' conversation touched upon various topics such as the death sentences, the judgment as a whole, and less serious topics of police and jail administration. I was only taking an intermittent interest in their talk because of my preoccupation with ideas of my own which came not at a stretch but in successive flashes. I had in this way run the gamut of the whole under-trial period and made several sweeping generalisations without being communicative about them. I told myself, for example, that we had become more human after the power to strike was wrested from our hands. Were our human feelings a spontaneous growth or only a spurious creation of the dependent conditions we had found ourselves in? Was not self-pity the source of all fellow-feeling? I had no occasion to answer such questions after careful analysis but I certainly felt sure of the capacity for mental growth, the basis of all healthy thought, which was not lacking in us.

I became conscious of the fact that my brother and I were objects of special care and attention on the part of the rest. It also occurred to me that a difference, though slight, had come to exist between our respective conditions of living from now on. We were, so to say, no more to appear on the same plane, see the same horizon before us and lead a similar life. They looked serious in varying degrees in their attempts to conceal their anxiety about our fate. We, a well-knit group, were by stages sorted out, weighed, labelled, and separated by powers beyond control. The idea put a stop to the parallel flow of my thoughts and turned my undivided attention towards my comrades. The conversation warmed up as we took a lively interest in each other's thoughts of the moment.

More than two hours had passed. The unhurried matter-of-fact voice of the Assistant Superintendent in charge of the condemned cells rang out.

"Let us go!"

The comrades began to embrace my brother and me: "We shall meet again within a few days," they said.

At the gate stood Ramzan, the Lambardar of Ward No. 15, an old prisoner who had been on duty here for many years. He had been there when S. Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev were in these cells. He had seen them hanged. He had had under his charge several revolutionaries who had met their end at the gallows. Hari Krishan of the Governor Shooting Case had lived here in his time. Ranbir Singh; Durga Das Khanna and Chaman Lal of the same case had occupied these cells.

He could relate many a characteristic story about the revolutionaries who had been set at liberty or sent to the gallows after some months' stay in Ward No. 15. S. Sajjan Singh of the Lahore Cantonment Murder Case had gone to the scaffold in the presence of Ramzan, who had helped him don the pre-execution dress. Sajjan Singh had planned to kill a European military officer. He went to his house but not finding him returned without doing anything. On his way back the idea occurred to him, "Why not kill the members of the family of the officer? Had the British allowed any scruple to stand in their way when they massacred Indians without discrimination of age and sex in Jallianwala Garden?" With this thought, he went back to the officer's house and committed the murders.

One of the duties of Ramzan was to prepare the prisoners for their journey to the gallows. He was the man who went early in the morning to the cell of the prisoner who had to die and announced, "Rise my friend, your time has come! Here is a bucketful of water; take your bath and remember your God!" It was he who with the help of jail warders tied the condemned prisoner's hands behind his back and fastened his shoulders.

"Ramzan! Are the cells ready?" I asked.

"Yes, we had made two cells vacant early in the morning and washed and cleaned them too," he replied with a sense of pride at his knowledge of our death sentences even before they were actually pronounced.

Within a few minutes the clothes were brought which we were to wear as condemned prisoners. We put them on, while standing inside the gate of the ward, while our comrades stood outside watching us. Their features reflected the impressions that our changing into new garb had formed upon them. The Assistant Superintendent outside was still busy entering their names and other details in his register, when we were taken into the cells.

PART II

CHAPTER I

"AS ONE OF THEM"

IN the forty condemned cells lay human beings like useless obnoxious things waiting for the day when they would be dumped under the soil. They were hale and hearty persons, young, old, good, bad, all sorts. They spoke, sang, laughed, ate and emitted thunderous noises out of the throats marked for the noose of the halter. Two of them had left for the old condemned cell in Ward No. 14, in order to make room for us.

It was a small cell, about eight feet wide and ten feet long. The prisoner walked, ate, slept and prayed here. This was his latrine, his bath-room, his study, temple, mosque, in short his world. He had to remain locked in it day in and day out till the dénouement of the drama of his life. This cell, similar to all others in the ward, was unclean with spots of expectoration, spots of urine, spots of life and death. The marks of expectoration on the walls and the floor appeared fresh when washed with water. Specimens of sickly, dying humanity had been here, living badly and praying incessantly, but the law of the land had been too stern for them. It had not punished, but eliminated them from the surface of the earth!

Men, unfortunate men, had lived in this cell. They had thought, felt, breathed under enormous pressure of impending death. The memory of them met, received and enveloped me as I was let into the place and locked in and left alone. I was one of those whose number was countless; only I had to start anew on their line. I had to take this inheritance of death-awaiters and add to it the share of memories my own death would leave behind. It was neither like entering a new profession nor learning a new art, because death could not be a profession, nor an art, whatever way one looked at it. To leave life and pass on to death without the actual happening of the thing was an impossibility. I wanted to become nothing different in outlook from the normal man who had the chance of dying any day.

There were eleven warders on duty in those cells that day.

They came to see me one by one. Some showed sympathy, others grief, and a few curiosity, regarding the new-comer. An old acquaintance remarked, "Be courageous all the time you are here, and remember you should go singing and shouting when your day comes!"

My objection to singing was considered valid by him on grounds of my inability to sing, and ability to create a bad impression by trying to do so. He was an interesting man and wanted to while away his time by talking to me. Every warder on duty for three or four hours at a stretch needs someone to talk to. On that particular day I had not had a moment's rest from morning till late in the night, so I felt tired and went to sleep.

I rose at about nine in the morning. The warder on duty seeing me open my eyes exclaimed, "You were sleeping fast, and a man has been taken out of his cell and hanged! He was a Pathan!"

I had a feeling of remorse at missing the chance of exchanging a parting word with the dying fellow-prisoner, and inquired gloomily, "Why did you not wake me?"

"What for, my friend?" asked the warder, a bit amused at my impatience with myself!

"To see him; to bid him the last farewell," I replied with a pang of heart.

He pointed towards the sheet-iron door of the compound of my cell and said, "They are all closed when someone is taken to the gallows, so you could not have seen him even if you had been awake at the time."

"I have seen several men go," he went on in a cynical tone, "but never such a rabbit as the man who went today. Ramzan made him bathe and wear black garments with much difficulty and great cunning because of the fellow's wild obstructive tactics. He created a great uproar while being handcuffed. His shoulders were tied while he rolled on the ground. All the condemned prisoners walk to the scaffold but this one had to be dragged along by force. Even God's name had gone out of him in abject terror of the rope! Weeping and crying is nothing but raising an alarm, but what is the use of it when it is absolutely certain that no help can avail you? He did not stop crying till the last."

"He must be hanging bravely now, with neither a trace of fear nor life in him," thought I.

Ramzan came back from the scaffold and entering my cell remarked with a tired look in his eyes, "O, what an obstinate

person the Pathan was! We had much ado to make him stand upon the wooden plank."

"Life is obstinate," I observed solemnly. Ramzan gave some further unhallowed details of the Pathan's execution, and when he went out the warder, resting his hands upon the bars of the cell-door, resumed his talk. "Here is Ramzan," he said, "a guide to the gallows. He has no sentiments, no qualms of conscience, and only knows how best to perform his duty of preparing men for the halter . . . but you will understand him better if you knew more about him, especially the story of his trial and conviction."

"What is it?" I asked, feeling interested.

The warder went on, "He himself was a warder in Rajanpur Jail, a mere boy at that time. One day, it was the festival of 'Id,' one of his Baloch countrymen happened to meet him outside the jail-gate and told him that he had come to see some of his relatives who were undergoing imprisonment in the jail. 'How can I happily celebrate the 'Id' unless my unfortunate relatives too can have a tasty morsel today?' cried the Baloch compassionately and importunately requested Ramzan to convey to them some Halwa which he had brought.

"Ramzan, the boy of tender feelings, was moved by the sentiments of the stranger and showed willingness to do as requested though it implied a great risk, even of his dismissal from service, if he was caught smuggling the prohibited article.

"It transpired that the stranger was in fact not a friend of the prisoners, but a cunning enemy. There was poison in the sweet Halwa and two of the prisoners who ate it died. Ramzan was arrested, found guilty and sentenced to death. One time he himself was a condemned prisoner like all of you. Later on the High Court commuted his sentence to that of transportation for life. Here he is, in the service of the condemned, for many years. He might have, in the beginning, felt a sort of relief while leading others to the gallows, at the idea of his fortunately not being one of them but even that sort of satisfaction is a short-lived one. Do you see what an automatic machine he has become with time?"

The warder's story ended when his time was up. I really felt I understood Ramzan better. He was automatic in so far as he was fixed in the machinery of prison administration. The humanity in him was labouring persistently though feebly under strong handcuffs.

CHAPTER 2

ALL ARE ONE AND THE SAME

WE, my brother and I, were "B" class prisoners but no other facility except that of "B" class diet was allowed to us. The jail authorities had written to the Government for instructions and after some days we were allowed to remain outside our cells in handcuffs, one at a time, till the evening lock-up. It was a great mental relief to bathe outside, to use the outer latrine, and most of all, to be able to see and converse with the fellow condemned prisoners. A prisoner might not feel a bit uneasy about his impending death, but he might not be able to eat his food without extreme disgust while his faeces lay uncovered in a corner of his cell.

Lala Sham Lal came to see us after he had filed our appeal in the High Court. The comrades from Ward No. 14 were also called for the interview which took place in the open compound near the gate. Blankets were spread on the ground and we all sat round Lalaji in a manner reminiscent of his first interview with us more than three years ago. It was he who had talked then, but now he was the listener for the most part and we the talkers. He was then anxious about our fate but today that fate was a reality devoid of all fears which are usually the outcome of uncertainty. He now wanted us to be strong and resolute. "We should only strive for the better without showing any weakness for better results," said he, the man of unflinching courage and faith who had striven for our good in the character of a true and noble friend, in the role of a peacemaker, in the capacity of a lawyer. It was now our turn to reassure him that the present life was not much different from that we had already led in the jail.

"Did you not feel life here particularly oppressive anyway?" he asked with his usual frankness.

"There was the feeling of inconvenience under excessive restraint but it is now gone since more latitude is allowed to us," I replied.

"Your relatives have proposed the name of a distinguished lawyer, the ablest in the province, for arguing your case in the High Court. His services can be hired if all of you, especially

the two brothers in these cells, desire," he informed us with the purpose of ascertaining our opinion.

"What is the use of bringing in a new lawyer?" I asked.

"It was expressive of the anxiety felt over the capital sentences," he replied gravely.

Some of the comrades expressed their agreement with Lalaji's view that our opinion in the matter should weigh with the rest. The idea had not come to me before that we could thus become the subject of serious consideration and that our legal defence would be the cause of added anxiety. The differentiation was not at all to our liking, especially in matters relating to our defence, and we felt called upon to dispel the embarrassing sort of anxiety felt about us and to reiterate our faith in Lalaji. We did this without the slightest hesitation and in the most unambiguous terms.

"You have given me a second vote of confidence and I shall serve you to the best of my ability," said Lalaji in his usual optimistic tone and added, "but as a faithful believer should always say, the result is in His hands."

An interesting thing to note was that the topic of violence and non-violence, which always led to lively discussion, could not be touched upon that day. We however made it up with other interesting conversation. Lalaji stayed with us for more than an hour and then rose to go. He promised to come again after the date for the hearing of our appeal was fixed.

We were permitted to see the rest of our comrades twice a week. The interview with them took place regularly in the compound of our ward. Our brothers and other relatives also came to see us once a week. We could also have books we wanted to read. Life had thus become as normal as it could be in the circumstances. Every evening the condemned prisoners raised religious slogans and greeted one another loudly from their respective cells. My brother and I were let out in the morning at different times and would talk to our fellow-prisoners. It was an opportunity to familiarise ourselves with the living, the half-dead, the all-but-dead, and to know what they felt, thought, and believed. There was the cloak of life spread over the crimes, the weaknesses, the fears, the strength and carelessness of spirit, and ours was no approach of strangers but of men who were in the same boat with them. Each one of them gave sparks of life, the reality which no fear of death, no certainty of the fast approaching last crisis could hide.

Here was the place where man could not be critical of man,

and neither hated nor loved, but held apart in the exclusive interests of good relations and fellow-feelings and touched upon subjects which were indisputably common to all. Loud talk linked one to the other. Out of forty cages rose one voice turned to one pitch, saying different things but meaning nothing more than that they were alive and wanted to live. Man here was reduced to the simplest and the most primitive life that could be lived in captivity with no useful function to perform except that of preparing for his end. I felt strongly that such a controlled life closely resembled death, even when nobody realised that he was under the shadow of such a dire calamity.

Another man had to go within a few days. I was not a little uneasy about him. The appointed hour had come for him. He was a young Sikh and shouted the religious cry of his community, "Bole so Nihal!" after he had bathed. All the condemned prisoners, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, responded with one voice "Sat Sri Akal!" The sheet-iron doors in front of my cells were closed. The warder on duty peeped outside through the small circular opening and told me they were tying his shoulders. His shouts continued to reach me.

A strong force of warders and jail staff came thumping into the ward and stood in a line between the two rows of cells. The Superintendent arrived a few minutes afterwards along with a magistrate and went straight to the cell of the young Sikh. The chief warder gave orders for the unlocking of the cell and the man was taken out. His shouts became increasingly vehement till his voice began to crack. My cell was the last in the row. He halted in front of it for a moment and cried, "All my Hindu, Muslim and Sikh brothers, I am leaving you, forgive me for my faults."

I could only catch a glimpse of part of his face through the opening in the door and he was gone like a flying patch of living flesh. His voice had become feebler and feebler till the crashing sound of the falling wooden plank silenced him forever.

The sound of the plank was but an echo reverberating in the ears of the living but the dying man passed beyond hearing it. I pictured him as he was hanging in the dry well with his neck twisted and his body stiffened, and felt a pang of heart for the first time since my confinement in these cells. He was in fact a member of the family to which we all belonged by right of forfeited lives, and his passing away reminded me forcibly of the fact that I was on the waiting list. I thought of him and he made me think of myself. Why should I think so painfully about

another's execution when my own was to be taken as lightly and indifferently as my convictions and patriotic feelings demanded? This only too reasonable question diverted my attention for a few moments but I knew soon that I could not help feeling uneasy. The sympathy for him had no doubt recoiled on myself or perhaps more truly the compassionate feelings I had just had were mostly due to the prospects of my own death in the near future. Sympathy was a two-edged sword which sacrificed or saved both the sympathiser and the sympathised. I wanted to be indifferent and took *The Taking of the Bastille*, the book I had with me that day, and tried to forget myself in it. From the pages of the book cropped up a vague story of a great crime and an infinitely greater punishment. The hanged man continued to attract me now from the scaffold, now from the path by which he was being led out; I followed the group of mourners who took his corpse away, felt as if I had completely lost sight of him and came back to my book which only said, "I am not so living a thing as he was." I was reminded of one of my childhood days when my mother had, while mentioning the passing by of a cartload of hanged Babar Akalis expressed deep satisfaction at my absence from the place at that time and said, "It is good that you did not see them." There was sound logic in her wish.

CHAPTER 3

THE CLAIM OF THE ROPE ON BROTHERHOOD

THERE were men convicted of various sorts of murders occupying these cells. Just next to mine was a boy hardly seventeen, a typical Punjabi villager, illiterate, rough and plain. He did not pray as the majority of condemned prisoners did all day long. He looked a contented sinner. I talked to him and knew his story. He and his elder brother had murdered their mother. The thing seemed incredible from his lips. Briefly, this is what he told me:

"We were poor village-folk. Our father had died when we were small children. Our mother reared us up with the meagre resources at her command, including a patch of land. She was

young and good-looking and fell in love with a neighbour who was also a peasant like us. There was an open scandal and nobody to check our mother, we being only minor kids. Boys of the village cast indecent remarks on us and our humiliation increased as we grew older. My elder brother grew of age and married. He would have attained to a respectable status in society but for our blackened name. Full two years had not gone before he became the father of two children. . . .

"But the people held him too much in contempt to recognise his position as the head of the family and continued to regard us as simple nobodies well used to their sarcastic remarks and pinching jokes. We felt great annoyance but were never in a position to retort. Too humbled in our own eyes to consider them in the wrong, we went on bearing all insults. . . .

"My mother and her lover had not forgotten their love yet though they never saw each other in our presence. One day a group of old villagers called upon us and rendered solemn advice in this matter affecting our honour. They said:

"'You shall not remain forever the young scamps you have been and must needs think like fully grown up responsible men. You ought to be mindful of matters concerning your self-respect and social position in the village and no longer allow your mother to have any relations with the neighbour. If you can't check her, you should at least induce her to marry the man according to the laws of Shariat.'

"It was neither a joke, nor a piece of sarcasm provocatively offered, but serious advice tendered in all good faith and earnestness without the slightest show of anger or contempt. They did not reprimand us for our failure to do anything to save our honour nor treat us as untouchables unfit for their society. We could yet attain to full self-respect and regard by others, they held, if we could but make our mother understand the whole situation. They hoped we could convert her to a healthier view about morality if we used our persuasive powers.

"We talked over the matter with our mother. She blushed a little, then lost the colour of her face when we told her what had been disturbing our minds for long. We then asked her to mend her ways and she became very serious and at last promised to abide by our wish.

"But there was no abiding effect on her, only a temporary embarrassment and feeling of shame. She did not put an end to her illicit love nor even try to do so. The same age-long filthy remarks were our fate whenever some young people came across

us in the village or outside. We reminded our mother of her promise again and again but to no purpose.

"One day my brother and I unexpectedly returned earlier than usual from the field where we had gone to work, and to our utter mortification saw her with the neighbour in the house. We went mad. It was too much. We saw nothing, and forgot that she was our mother. The neighbour ran away. We wished we were immediately dead. The woman lay on the bed with her face concealed beneath the bed-sheet. Neither of us wanted to see that face again. My brother caught hold of a *takwa* and beheaded her with a single furious blow. Her blood ran over the floor of the room. We were not horrified but gave out sighs of relief again and again.

"All the village was excited. We had done a good thing in the eyes of all. The police arrested us the same day and we confessed our guilt. During the trial, it became evident to me that I was to be sentenced to transportation for life and my brother to death. He had his wife and children too. The idea of his dying rent my heart. I was even sensible to the prospects of his young widow undertaking the same path my mother had followed after my father's early death. It was worse than the previous ignominious state of affairs which had forced us to commit the murder of our mother. The dreadful idea made me tremble from head to foot. I felt it was better that I should die in place of my brother. I discussed the matter with him. The plan in my mind was to make a confession in the court taking all the responsibility for the murder on myself. I was to deny that my brother was present at the time and tell the court that the police had implicated him falsely for the simple reason that I was a mere boy and the court might disbelieve the fact that I alone committed the murder.

"I actually made this statement before the Sessions Judge, denying any complicity of my brother in the crime. He sentenced me to death and so I am here. My brother was set free and regularly comes to see me. I shall introduce him to you when he comes next time."

The story of this young man's noble sacrifice greatly touched me. I met his brother, a fellow looking more simple and innocent even than he. I wondered whether any crime could ever touch the purity of these souls. He remained in the cells for four months or so when the High Court changed his sentence to one of transportation for life on grounds of his tender age. He went to the Borstal Jail. I was happy that he was saved from the gallows.

CHAPTER 4

"I LIKE ADVENTURE! I LOVE LIBERTY!"

THERE was a Pathan named Rahim Gul in one of the cells, who, though treated as a condemned prisoner, was not under sentence of death. The jail authorities considered him mad and a very dangerous fellow. I met him very often but could find no madness in him though he was an extremely nervous and hot-tempered person. He could evince much interest in my ideas and show great sympathy for them. He always seemed eager to listen to what I had to say to him and looked the humblest of men whenever I met him. One day he said, "Being a Pathan, I like adventure, and love liberty!"

When an old man was to die, he would exclaim with the extraordinary enthusiasm characteristic of him, "I am not unhappy at this hanging. He ought to be hanged," but when a young man had to go he would remark with a rueful expression on his face, "What a pity! Why are they going to hang so beautiful a youth? I cannot comprehend this. They should hang me in his place. I gladly offer myself for the gallows." He was usually moved to such a degree at such moments that he would not stop crying for hours after the execution had taken place.

His story in brief was that he had got transportation for life for a murder that took place as the result of a trifling quarrel. He went mad in jail and was sent to the Mental Hospital, where he is said to have committed six more murders of different persons who came in contact with him. He was sentenced to death for these murders but the High Court gave him transportation for life instead. The hospital authorities would not admit him again, so he was a permanent occupant of a cell in this ward.

He had his jolly moods when he would sing and dance inside his cell. He could sing in a high melodious voice and knew how to turn his permanent fetters into a wondrous instrument of music.

He was a habitual smoker but the jail laws did not permit him to smoke. He always felt very badly about this. One day he saw a Mohammedan warder on duty puffing a cigarette and enquired of him,

"Are you a Momin or a Kaffir?"

The warder, a new man in the service, replied with a show of humility, "A Momin."

"No, you are a Kaffir; worse than a Kaffir," shouted Rahim Gul angrily, adding with no less acerbity, "You go on smoking and do not invite a brother Momin! Were you a Momin, you would never have failed to do so."

The warder was confounded by this unexpected onslaught of his co-religionist and presently made amends for his un-Momin-like behaviour.

One day he fell out with the doctor in charge of the ward and refused to eat his food in protest against bad medical treatment. Rahim Gul was a weak, skinny person unable to withstand the rigours of a hunger-strike and there was a risk to his life, so the doctor had to resort to forcible feeding the very next day. He brought necessary equipment for nasal feeding and the liquid food and stood ready to feed him. Rahim Gul's avid, eager eyes fell again and again upon the feeding-cup and he began questioning the doctor thus:

"How much milk will you give me?"

"Two seers," replied the doctor.

"What else?" asked the Pathan uneasily.

"Two eggs, butter two oz., sugar four oz., and the juice of some *maltas*," was the pleasant information he got.

"Well, it is good," declared the Pathan, adding only too wisely, "but you who were not ready to give half a seer of milk to me have brought so many things now! Can I believe that all these things are there in the cup?" and craning his neck to have a look at the food, cried, "I see no trace of eggs in it. It is whiter than undiluted milk."

The doctor let the suspicious Pathan have another look and assured him that it was a food much richer than milk.

"Well," responded the Pathan, "do not feed me through the nose. I shall try to drink it willy-nilly by mouth!"

The doctor smiled and said, "In that case you must give up your hunger-strike."

"No hunger-strike as long as I get these things regularly," agreed Rahim Gul, with a defiant look at the medical man. The latter refused to give him milk by mouth and ordered the convict Lambardars to hold the prisoner down by force. This done, he introduced a large rubber tube into the hunger-striker's nose and fed him through it.

Forcible feeding is a painful, nerve-racking process for the

prisoner, but it is a troublesome and tedious job for the doctor too. After some days the latter made a gesture of compromise by agreeing to abandon the use of force if Rahim Gul himself took the tube into his nose. Feeding by mouth, he assured him, was not in his power unless the Superintendent permitted him to do so.

Rahim Gul, never sure about the quantity of the good things mixed in his diet, suspected the doctor of cheating him of a part of them and tried to find out the supposed trick in various ways. He would smell the liquid to make sure whether malta-juice was there or not, or lick a drop or two from the rubber tube to ascertain the quantity of sugar mixed. It was indeed hard for him to believe in the integrity of the man who had not the commonsense to give half a seer of milk willingly but was ready to force more than two seers of it in addition to other costly nourishment into a weak man's stomach. The Superintendent, however, saw the reason in the argument after a period of about three weeks and promised the Pathan half a seer of milk daily, thus making him give up the hunger-strike.

Rahim Gul was locked for twenty-four hours in his cell and had never been let out even for a few minutes but he did not seem to mind this solitary confinement, which was contrary to all jail laws, rules and regulations. One day it occurred to him that the lawful ration of two cigarettes daily had not been given to him for six days while he was under the sentence of death in these very cells. The Deputy Superintendent had in fact disallowed the cigarettes lest the madman might set his bedding on fire, but he had agreed to allow them after six days. Rahim Gul now demanded the arrears, the twelve cigarettes which he had not been given several months back.

The jail authorities refused as usual with a good grace to meet the Pathan's demand and he went on hunger-strike again. The same old process of forcible feeding started for the second time. When an official or a non-official visited the ward, the Pathan would complain about the non-supply of cigarettes and explain. "See! They don't give me my lawful ration but spend two rupees daily upon feeding me by force. They call me mad and themselves wise! Take it from me that they will come to reason at last but nobody would censure them for their foolishness. I am mad indeed only for them."

His talk was amusing, his calculating mentality of much psychological interest and his never-failing protest against the well-organised jail force illuminating. His hunger-strike came to an

end when the doctor, the person most interested in the removal of the cause of an unnecessary bother, brought more than twelve cigarettes and handed them to him.

Rahim Gul died later in jail, after about two years' continuous solitary confinement.

CHAPTER 5

NOT AN ACCIDENT FOR THE THOUGHTFUL!

THE comrades in Ward No. 14 Old entered upon a new phase of existence as they became convict prisoners in contrast to the under-trial accused they had been for the past three years. The new status brought in new relationships, conditions, restrictions, and rules, adding to the authority of the jail officers and curtailment in the liberty of the prisoners; it meant that the latter had begun to live in terms of their imprisonment. They did their daily labour, and passed their days under a stricter regime of punitive law, without losing hold of the mentally recreative and instructive side of their career so far as the conditions permitted.

The interviews with them on prescribed days afforded us great joy and satisfaction. We would sit together upon blankets spread in the open courtyard of Ward No. 14 and enjoy a lively talk. They told us about the day-to-day developments of our case in the High Court as well as about their own experiences as convict prisoners. Pandit Rupchand was fond of birds which he kept as pets and he always came in the company of one. He had a beautiful baby squirrel too, that usually lay asleep in his pocket. It was nourished by milk soaked in a cotton pad; comrade Krishan Lal had baptised it as "Baby Roshanlal" and he would call it aloud by this name again and again in an amusing way. The nightingale, perched upon the shoulder of Pandit Rupchand, had no name but this did not detract from its social position which was by no means inferior to that of the squirrel. It was unable to sing but this took away nothing from its love-inspiring existence. One had only to point out a finger in lieu of showing it a piece of some eatable, and it opened wide its mouth.

The comrades would bring new books for us and take away the old. We often discussed those already read by us.

Lala Sham Lal would come at times in the company of Lala Faqir Chand or alone, and then we were all called together for interview. I could see that hard times had taken away a part of his usual optimism. One of the comrades asked him one day what impression he was making upon the High Court bench and he replied a bit gravely, "Mr. Justice Daleep Singh is a judge of exceptional talent whom it is very difficult to impress unless one went well-prepared with one's case. Mr. Justice Currie looks disinterested in my arguments and seems to believe that the prosecution case is true. I am not sure whether I shall obtain the desired result from the appeal or not."

Mehta Pran Nath, a junior counsel, told us one day, "No one can foresee the outcome of the case, but one thing is certain: the police too have an anxious time, so far as your appeal is concerned. Sayed Ahmad Shah, the Deputy Superintendent, goes barefooted every day to the shrine of Data Gunj Bux in fear of retribution he might receive for the illegalities committed by him during the investigation of the case."

The only occasion my brother and I were let out of our cells together was when someone came to see us, but we had in fact nothing much to say to each other. The reason, simply told, was that our natures differed, though no actual difference had ever come between us. We had no common interests so far as literature or art was concerned and the less intellectual topics could hardly take us much further than brief, desultory conversation. Almost every prisoner in these cells was my brother's friend because he gave more time to them and less to reading of books. He had an unhesitating, straightforward method of approach which could be well described as a direct attack upon another's reserve and scruples. He could befriend a total stranger in no time but it seemed nothing could make a deep, abiding impression upon him. *He was not so considerate as generous* in his dealings with men who were all friends for him without any great distinctions. Never niggardly of heart, he denied no one the right to draw upon his friendship and sympathies, but there was an illusive aspect of his attachments that became obvious to the critical mind happening to hold long social contact with him.

Each prisoner in the ward was allowed half an hour's daily walk inside the courtyard in front of his cell with his handcuffs on and the sheet-iron door shut. This was all the liberty they

had under the sky. We talked to them all the time we were out of our cells. While my brother was familiar with all, I had befriended some of them though by a slow process of steady advances on both sides.

There was a youth by the name of Shiv belonging to the city of Lahore. He lived in Shahalmi Gate and did a broker's business in partnership with a man whose shop was inside Mori Gate. Himself a young man of not more than twenty-four, he believed in the good faith of his aged partner who proved to be no more than a typical business man of the low, selfish sort. Their firm had transacted business to the extent of some thousands, the commission on which was appropriated by the old partner over and above the head of Shiv. The papers of their business contract were lying with the former. Shiv asked him to bring them to him but he would make some flimsy excuse and not comply with his wish. One day he told Shiv that the papers had been given to a lawyer who was to return them within a few days. Shiv began to be suspicious of his *bona fides* and wanted to find out the motive underlying all the suspicious tactics of his partner, but the old one was too clever for him and always evaded his grasp.

Divali brought ill-luck to both of them. On the day of the festival they were sitting in their shop inside Mori Gate when Shiv in a sudden fit of frankness laid bare his heart before his partner saying, "Today is a sacred day. I swear by God I will not mind at all if you tell me the truth about the papers. You are an old man with a family and might have needed some money but where is the necessity for making pretences before me?"

The old man took these words of Shiv as a dire insult to his respectability. Flying into a rage, he rushed at the young man with a knife in his hand to stab him. Shiv had swung back in an instant and caught hold of a chair in panic. He pushed back the old man with it with such force that the latter fell staggering upon the floor with the full weight of his body falling upon the knife still firmly held in his right hand. The knife went straight through his entrails and he was dead in a few moments.

"What an accident!" I remarked when Shiv had paused in his story.

"Yes," he said with a deep sigh. He went on after a pause. "I did not try to conceal the matter, but went straight to the Anarkali police station and reported the accident to the police.

They did not believe me and put me up for trial on a charge of murder. Later on the courts too did not believe me and I got the death sentence. I could not defend my case well because I was too poor to hire the services of an able lawyer."

His days were numbered. This was the terrible reality that arose before my eyes. The High Court too had rejected his appeal and now he was waiting for his end. He had not even thought of murdering his partner in self-defence. Certainly, he spoke the truth, because murderer or no murderer, there was now nothing left for him but to die, and no distortion of facts could be of any help to him. We talked daily for hours. We had bound ourselves in ties of friendship. What a dead certain limit was put to our talks, our friendship! What an enormous wrong had been done him in the name of justice! Why kill anybody in error or misunderstanding? What certain proof had the courts that nothing but his death could serve the purpose of justice? He had spoken the truth before the police because he was conversant with no law except that of his conscience, because he was humble and poor and felt he had been the cause of the death of another poor man like himself. He blundered into a frank avowal about the existence of a cause of quarrel between him and the deceased, thus giving the police an unfailing handle for charging him with deliberate murder and bringing about his conviction. The prosecution alleged an animosity based upon the clash of interests between the two.

Had he but a smattering of law and a bit of insight into the mentality of the custodians of the law, he would have remained silent rather than give any such information as would ensure his conviction. But a catastrophe had resulted and his conscience became uneasy. He was sorry for his insulting words, sorry beyond measure at his being the cause of provocation to the old man. He fled from him in terror. He was weak and timid and beat a retreat, but when there was left no space to run *backwards, he defended himself with a chair. The old man's* knife flashed at him again and again and he succeeded in pushing him back with the chair once, and that was all. The police, the trying magistrate, the Sessions Judge and even the Judges of the High Court had in a singular way miserably failed to grasp the truth and given him a confused push towards the other world. They had the legal right, however, to err to any extent, but it was a great tragedy that they could not find out the true facts of the case. No one failed, however, in the mimicry of justice which amounts to killing a man for a man, like the killing of a

fly for a fly. A murder got into one scale of their balance, and they had nothing to do except provide a counterpoise for the other scale. The neck of an innocent man was to be wrung for the failings of others.

I saw him grow more pensive and vague in his conversation as the days went by as if in deep communion with death. He would revive and come back at once whenever I called at his door. "I have been waiting for you for a long while," he would usually remark with a smile upon his pale lips.

"I value your friendship most," he would declare. "It is the most precious thing in my life," he would add.

"Where is your life?" was the inevitable question that echoed through my whole being but never came out in the form of words. I would divert his attention from the over-serious topic of death to other interesting subjects and find satisfaction in the ease with which he, a simple, half-educated young man, forgot himself in conversation about trifling things.

The burden of preparing for the end was becoming heavier and heavier for him. Left alone he walked in his cell with light, feeble steps as though slightly pulled again and again by the strong magnet of Death.

At last the hour came. Ramzan, coming back after the execution, told me that Shiv was no more. This time he mentioned no details of the hanging and laid stress only on the mechanical aspect of the killing business and the organised Governmental machinery behind it. His words signified an intelligent apprehension of reality rather than of his feelings. I knew him to be discerningly cold and feelingless. It was akin to being sympathetic. He could talk about death with perfect calmness, which was not consequent upon any callousness of heart, but a gift of reason.

"It is always so easy to die in the hands of a machine, because it cares for no emotion, no idea, no distinctions between crime and innocence, and is too sure to miss its target. It wields a godlike absolute power. Human beings on the other hand know nothing but to confuse and complicate matters for their fellow human beings. What do the relatives of the condemned do except make an already miserable death more miserable for these unfortunates? Too much emotion is the bane of our social life."

Executions were frequent. The cells vacated by the executed were occupied by those who were to be executed, all the forty of them always contained forty men as if the place knew how to provide itself with breakable human material. Those who went

caused little discouragement to those who remained. The law of life could not be reversed even where people lived exclusively under the law of death. More demand for life, that was what the death-awaiters did. Little things became great; feeble expectations turned into strong hopes, insignificant wishes grew into intense desires, souls struggled to rise from the depths once again to former heights, chests heaved to throw off the crushing burden of death, and one thought of all possible means of safety and staked all one possessed on earth in the gamble for survival. Lawyers' fees and bribes financially ruined many a family but no one considered himself the poorer if he succeeded in obtaining his deliverance from the jaws of death. All these were signs of an invincible urge for life. A man went to the gallows after reducing to beggary all whom he left behind, but another did the same without benefiting in the least from such an illuminating example. He saw the last of many a fellow-prisoner and thought and heard of death, of nothing but death, in his waking hours, and dreamt of terrible things in his dreams, but all this meant no abandonment of hope. The condemned seemed to imitate more or less the cold logic of Ramzan so far as the deaths of others were concerned. It was the logic of the place telling upon each and every mind.

I too could not wholly escape the influence of my environment. I realised I was not taking so seriously the later executions as I had done in the case of Shiv's. The habit of counting the days, hours and minutes for the departing men was losing much of its painful contents. "Life at all costs" was not the philosophy for me, much less that of regarding one's own self as the most important thing in the world. I could imagine the dropping of the curtain and the sinking of my being into the gloom of the future without feeling troubled about it. I had learnt that the abject fears I had witnessed in some were the result of the thought of personal danger reaching undue proportions under the stimulus of death. The sting of death was ineffective when I thought more and more of others and less and less of myself. I did not create a poison of my own for myself. Fortunately there were no self-created obstacles in my path. I tried to lead as normal a life as was possible under the circumstances. Unhealthy, abnormal thinking creates unreasonable fears. I knew the truth and benefited by it.

Our brothers who regularly came to see us never showed the slightest anxiety about our fate. They had neither wanted to ask the why and wherefore of our being here, nor ever tried to bring

our Party-work under discussion. They only knew that we were in trouble for reasons of our own, and tried to help us, and that was all. This attitude had been not a little gratifying. Other relatives also occasionally came to see us. There were, however, some of our relations in Government service, and others who were simply afraid of the Government, who never saw us at all. They felt their position had become more awkward after the death sentences we had got. One of our near relatives came one day along with our brothers. He was a good talker and looked very much at ease in his conversation with us. He reminded me of the familiar environment of our home. It was the best attitude he could have adopted but to my great surprise Amrik Singh blurted out, "I see our relative has come for the formal offering of condolence whilst others have simply an interview with us as their objective."

The relative, a wise old man of cool temperament, smiled away the sarcastic remark. We resumed our talk as if nothing had happened.

CHAPTER 6

"NO SOFT FEELINGS AND SENTIMENTS PLEASE!"

GIRDHARI, another condemned prisoner, belonging to Haryana Prant, was a Jat but looked like a typical Rajput warrior. I met him every day but never found him in a depressed mood. On the first day of our acquaintance, I had asked, "What have you done?" and his reply was,

"Someone murdered a bitch; I did nothing."

It was about two hours after his arrival in our ward. I looked at him again and again puzzled at his blunt reply and smiling face. He had gone through a long journey in handcuffs and fetters but there was not a trace of weariness upon his features.

I came to know him better within a few days. There was no yearning, no desire, no anxiety strong enough to create an aching void in his heart. He did not care for his home. His aged mother was left without any monetary resources, but he was confident of her ability to carry through the remainder of her life without him. There was a married woman in a neighbouring

village whom he had loved and who had been in love with him. He paid frequent visits to her without fear, without any thought of danger, and perhaps without any consciousness of guilt. He told me, "I was No. 1 in the locality and no one had dared to challenge me for many years." He admitted having done many evil deeds during his life, and declared, "I am not a good man . . . but, I did not murder the bitch. I loved her more than anyone else in the world."

"Why do you call her a bitch then?" I enquired.

He repeated the words in the emphatic tone natural to him, "Yes, Yes, the bitch."

He then looked full in my face and added, "I say so deliberately. I did not fear anybody in the whole of the Hariana Prant and challenged even the police . . . but this bitch has sent me into the condemned cells. I do not repent. Never can I say that I did not love her. The first man to note our love was her idiotic husband, but what could he do? In a few months the whole of the village knew. She too was a plucky lass. The Jats of the village were courageous people but no one dared question me why I was there without any apparent cause. Had they taken upon themselves to kill me they could have done so to the deep satisfaction of everybody in the village. I might have been murdered without a clue being ever found out, without even a complaint being lodged with the police by anyone that such a thing had happened. The village-folk adopted the safest means of getting rid of me. They lured the bitch into the open fields far from the village and put her to death. They then reported to the police that Girdhari had been seen in the vicinity that day. The crime of murder was thus thrown upon me. They had been conspiring for long to kill both the birds with one stone and their labours were crowned with success. I had committed murders but had never been arrested. They ignored the murders but could not ignore my love for a bitch. The world stands upon truth, that is my view of it."

A strange sinner he was, with not a trace of remorse in him except the single integrated feeling for paying, paying in cash, so to say, for the wrongs he had done in the past. He looked willing and resolute to the last without a nervous tremor in his iron frame.

All his appeals had been rejected within a short period. The appointed day for him came. I was standing in front of his cell when Ramzan came to remove the earthen pitcher and cup which are given to every prisoner inside a cell and removed on

the eve of his execution lest he might, in a fit of desperation, do an injury to himself. Girdhari took his meal heartily. Ramzan told him by way of advice, "You should not fill your stomach very much as it is better that your stomach should remain empty tomorrow."

Girdhari replied with perfect sang-froid, "I am hungry, my friend. Why should I remain so all night long? Give me my *gur* also. I shall take it just now. I am also entitled to tomorrow's ration. I have no mind to go hungry on my journey to the other world. I want to get my meal earlier in the morning, so that I may take it before the execution."

The imminence of death had no effect upon Girdhari's nerves. He was quite normal. I saw him looking through the iron bars of his cell-door and felt he was taking the last glimpse of sunset in his life. Small thin clouds were visible in the patch of sky above his head and the lagging rays of the sun were playing upon them. "What were you thinking just now?" I asked.

"I am going to be hanged because of the bitch. I do not know who killed her," he replied unaffectedly.

"What are your feelings just now?" I questioned again with the idea of finding out what the frustration of love could mean to him. He replied, "I don't feel like being hanged tomorrow. They will certainly hang me but my heart refuses to admit that this is the end of everything, and its normal beating shows as if nothing is going to stop it. I am quite normal as you are. Your lock-up time is approaching. Write my last letter for me!"

He placed a blank post-card in my hand and began to dictate the following:—

"My dear mother,

I have been hanged today. I don't feel sorry. You should also not be depressed. Good wishes from me to all in the village. Well, *Ram Ram*, to you and the rest.

Your loving son,
Girdhari."

The date on the letter was that of his execution.

He ate his food in the morning and demanded his ration of *gur* too. Outside his cell, he bade a common farewell to all the prisoners and was then led away to the gallows. I could not see him because the outer doors were shut.

Ramzan returned after the execution and standing before my cell exclaimed, "What a man he was! I have only seen a few

like him all the long time I have been here. He was just up to the standard of politicals whose executions I have witnessed."

"What must be done should be done with good grace, even if it be meeting one's own end," was the motto before Girdhari. Nature had given him a brusque way of dealing with disagreeable things. He had spurned the idea of his fast-approaching death and not given much thought to it. He ate, drank, slept and awoke with unabated contempt for his death. He would not think and therefore could not believe that it had anything to do with him. He might have had the illusion that even the noose of the rope would not succeed in fully strangling the life out of him. Extraordinary attitudes for extraordinary circumstances! He had died for the love of a woman but without the feeling of any conscious sacrifice on his part. He had not murdered the woman but that did not make him brood over his innocence. He had chosen very appropriate designations for himself and his beloved, a great sinner and a bitch respectively. He squeezed his life dry of all self-given values and worths and pinned his faith on boldness of heart. That is why there was a challenging mood upon him and a defiant look in his eyes as he ascended the steps to the scaffold. It was not he who was meeting death but the enemy who had killed his beloved, because he himself was guilty of several murders..

The dead left memories and impressions of their waiting period and their eventual meeting with the hanging rope, and those on the waiting list gathered them up in their curious heads which were turned towards the same path. Death is a bigger show than life for the dying man and he pricks his ears and opens wide his eyes in order to be familiar with the path. There is always a small minority who refuse to see or understand anything. The average condemned man is resigned to his fate and goes in an unostentatious way without any crying or bewailing. A rare one shows extraordinary courage or weakness. A little change of colour or voice or a slight unsteadiness in his gait is usual before he mounts the gallows, and that is how fear affects the average man.

My eldest sister had wanted to come to see me but my brothers had not brought her along with them for the interview. All the family members knew about the tenderness and compassion of her nature and our eldest brother told us, "I have deliberately held her back but she insists again and again upon seeing you. What can I do knowing full well that she would not be able to control her tears at the mere sight of you, even of the jail gate from

a considerable distance? "

The sister had come from her village at the news of our death-sentences and had not gone back because she wanted to see us. Our family people had been giving different excuses for not bringing her for interview and had at last told her the real reason. "You are sure to start weeping and thus make them (Amrik Singh and me) feel awkward in the eyes of others," they said.

We pleaded with our brothers to let her come notwithstanding her inability to control her tears. She was then taught again and again that weeping was something utterly useless, that they did not want us to repent and grieve over what we had done, and that it was no business of theirs to criticise our conduct; and at last elicited a promise from her that she would not shed a tear, whatever happened. They exhorted her to practise will-control lest she might prove a cause of disgrace to our name.

She came next week along with other members of our family. We all sat down upon blankets spread over the small courtyard before my cell, she remained seated in a corner all the while looking at both of us and uttered not a word. She was a generous old soul, affectionate and amiable, and I remembered many occasions when she had come to visit us or when I had gone to see her at her village home. She would welcome me with an ecstatic joy in her eyes and go on caressing my back with her hand while gentle words flowed out of her lips. The same kindly soul now sat suppressed, overawed and mute, her changing complexion betraying the tumult in her heart. She acknowledged our greetings with an imperceptible nod of her head and then sat down. It was a hard struggle, almost a torture, for her to withhold all expression of her feelings. Her right to speak was vetoed by the fear of her never being able to see us again if she did not remain calm and quiet according to her given word. She held herself aloof in spite of our efforts to involve her in conversation. She only looked and looked but did not speak. All stood up at the conclusion of the interview and she too had to stand. She stepped out when the others stepped out. Her looks showed her utter helplessness at the moment of departure. We bade her good-bye to which she only replied with the folding of her hands. The ordeal for her was at an end at last. She had emerged successful though at the cost of complete suppression.

CHAPTER 7

THE CHALLENGE OF A FANATIC!

THERE was a Nihang Sikh in one of the cells already on hunger-strike when we were admitted into the ward. His protest was against the sentence of death unjustly passed against him and in support of his demand for acquittal. He talked little, heard little, saw little and showed indifference to all who tried to approach him in an official or non-official capacity. His fast began the very day he was sentenced and had continued since then. He broke off all relationship with human beings. He prayed to God all day long and for the greater part of the night and seemed to have nothing to do with the reason of fellow human beings. The jail authorities viewed his demand as an impossible one, finding it absolutely beyond their authority to comply with his demand. His appeal in the High Court was yet to be decided and the jail authorities had offered to write to the judges concerned about his hunger-strike and his reasons for resorting to it but he paid no heed to such offers and refused to be impressed by them.

He resisted forcible feeding till he was completely exhausted. There was always a hard tussle between him and his captors before they succeeded in overpowering him. He beat them with his handcuffs which were not removed from his hands at any time.

He would never take part in the shouts of "Allah-o-Akbar," "Sat-Sri-Akal," and "Ram Ram" with which the condemned prisoners greeted one another every morning and evening. He preferred his "Path" to eating and sleeping, and formalities of every sort including conversation with jail officers were regarded by him as mere waste of time. He was a soldier of God intent upon giving a determined fight to the worldly justice which had perpetrated a grave injustice upon him.

I would go to see him now and then. He responded to my greetings and even talked for a few minutes on matters other than his fast and his reasons for it. He usually stood at his iron door, one foot upon the floor and the other resting upon the middle horizontal bar, his hands gripping two perpendicular bars. His lips moved continuously while his eyes remained closed.

I was impressed by his suffering and thought and felt about

him. The jail staff, the doctors, and many prisoners had tried to persuade him that the step he had taken was not necessary since it could not influence the decisions of a court. He seemed to recognise no difference between the judicial and the jail administrations and was not even willing to send an application to the High Court stating the grounds of his innocence. He had never uttered so much as a single word in response to all the advice and suggestions given to him by various persons. I felt I ought to see if something could be done in the way of alleviating the suffering of his remaining days of captivity.

He seemed somewhat well-disposed towards me perhaps because I was a "political" and a Sikh too. Every time I met him he would remark cordially with a smile upon his face,

"You are always quite all right."

I would ask about his health but hesitate to broach the topic of his fast which had gradually reduced him physically. He looked too contented with his step to pay heed to any advice to the contrary. Another thought that occurred again and again to me was, "Why disturb his peace of mind? He is suffering from hunger, no doubt, but it matters little if his sentence is not reprieved."

He would give up his leaning posture over the bars of the door, cross his hands over his chest, look at me and smile, and become inattentive after a few minutes. He thought neither of men nor things but of God. He seemed to possess infinite endurance.

"What is the cause of your hunger-strike, Nihangji?" I ventured to ask one day finding him in an unusually communicative mood.

He cast a painful glance at me, closed his eyes and resumed his "Path" and that was all.

I felt very sorry that I had offended him. I realised, as I stood looking at his thin gaunt figure that his protest was not against courts or jail but against injustice and it was backed by all the might of God in him. My attempt to argue with him was in vain. His unreason was in fact his greatest reason, allowing a man's word to bear no meaning for him.

I apologised to him the next day and he said, "You too were like the rest."

"It was my mistake, Nihangji," I repeated. His features relaxed perceptibly. I was happy he had forgiven my fault.

One day, after about three months of his hunger-strike, one of our lawyers, Amolak Ram, came along with Lala Sham Lal

to have a legal interview with us and told me that he had appeared in the High Court on behalf of the Nihang and that his appeal had been accepted.

The interview with us being over, Amolak Ram obtained permission from the Assistant Superintendent to see the Nihang and we both went to the cell of the latter. He was standing at his door as was his wont. Amolak Ram giving him the happy news said, "Nihangji, I have appeared on your behalf and justice has prevailed at last. My name is Amolak Ram. The High Court has acquitted you and the orders for your release will arrive in a day or two."

The Nihang indicated by a nod of his head that he understood what was said to him and resumed his prayer without showing the least satisfaction at the news. Amolak Ram, a bit puzzled, questioned me with his eyes as to the reason of such strange behaviour on the part of his client and I told him that he had been on hunger-strike ever since the day of his conviction, and prayer has been his sole weapon of fighting the injustice done to him. We again looked at him but found him neither happy nor sad.

In the evening the doctor came and going straight to his cell cried aloud, "Sat-Sri-Akal, Nihangji! I congratulate you. God is merciful. He has done justice to you. Drink some milk, now that your demand has been met!"

The Nihang replied curtly, "I will not take food while I am in jail," and began to go through his "Path." The doctor had to resort to forcible feeding as usual.

His relatives came to interview him shortly afterwards and advised him to take his food and thank the Almighty but he paid little heed to the first part of their advice and informed them that he would break his fast in the Gurdwara at Mozang.

He went out after four days without having once tasted the salt of the jail except under overpowering force.

He was the man to disregard completely all external circumstances, however compelling their nature, and in his internal side beat the drum of God to the exclusion of the soft and persuasive voices of reason, art and beauty. Death required as much careful thought as life. He knew only how to handle both roughly. The death sentence had complicated his life. He yearned for simplicity, hence his disgruntled attitude. He only fought and fought till he gained his freedom. Nothing happened to bring him any disillusionment. He was no pliant material to be moulded into a different pattern. Death could have meant

no defeat for him. The acceptance of his appeal was the most reasonable thing that ever happened to a fellow-prisoner since my coming into these cells.

CHAPTER 8

A HALTING POINT

THERE was an old Mohammedan carpenter with a husky voice, now become hardly intelligible, who was in the grip of abject terror. He would entreat a passing officer or a warder or a convict lambardar to stand awhile and listen to him. He usually told the story of his exploits in the field of masonry. He wanted to impress upon the Superintendent of the jail that he would construct a splendid building for him on condition he was set free. He approached everybody to intercede with the said officer for him.

It became evident to him after a few weeks in the cell, that his scheme had failed to produce the desired effect and he hit upon another that was calculated to be more successful. He now began to tell everybody that he had a large stock of very valuable brass utensils lying with his daughter. All that would be given to the Superintendent if he would save him from the gallows.

His feeble frame shook as he talked, his drawn-up features showed panic, his beseeching eyes looked injured and he seemed quite in earnest disclosing these schemes of his to others.

The fever of death was causing the gradual emaciation of both body and mind.

His day was drawing nearer. One day he began to complain. "They had tied my daughter to the wooden frame and given her thirty stripes with the cane, that is why she could not come to see me."

He was said to have murdered his wife in a fit of anger. A cold-blooded murder has a plan behind it and the murderer might take long to accept failure and defeat, but he who kills in a fit of emotion without any preconceived design soon loses the "murder heat" and becomes conscious of his guilt even when there are no immediate prospects of his being brought to

book. He was not in a fit state of mind to confess or to tell of his reaction after the event but his soul had been uneasy, no doubt. The misfortune of misfortunes was that he looked guilty. His youthful daughter, the sole object of his love, did not or could not come for an interview. It meant that the world at large had forsaken him altogether. It was also one of the causes forcing him to think for himself, to ward off the danger by persistent planning of the way out. The twenty-four hours of cell life produced dreadful thoughts in him. Totally illiterate as he was, he knew no way of escape. He could neither explain his thoughts and feelings nor give expression to the difficulties experienced by him as a prisoner. He had worked hard all his life at his trade without giving a conscious thought to religion. He did not know how to say his *Namaz*. He even lacked the consolation a prayer might afford. He was very old, too old to grasp reality, and life that contains it was fast slipping away. He was at a loss as to what he should do.

He thought about his death, he thought about his daughter, while a fire was raging inside him. That was how he made wild signs to everybody and talked only in terms of danger signals.

The jail officers did not inform him beforehand, as was the custom, of the date of his execution. They did not take out the earthen cup and pitcher on the eve of the execution lest he might die of shock. Was he even capable of succumbing to a shock? There had been an excruciating puzzle in his mind, a terror before and a terror after. He was unable to see his way to the gallows, and might have died beforehand so far as his consciousness was concerned. A seat, a support to stand upon, was given him by the plank and the rope and he sank like a dead-weight. Was hanging of any purpose to him or to society? Someone had shouted "Nara-i-Takbir" when he was being taken away, and all the Hindu, Mohammedan and Sikh condemned prisoners had responded with "Allah-o-Akbar." But he was deaf to everything.

His was the most unexplainable death within my knowledge. Why was he so wretched, so ignorant, so forlorn as to be unable to find a single sustaining idea out of his long life? Why was he so poorly equipped for death? Everyone responsible for giving him a push, a blind kick towards the other world, should be able to furnish the reply.

My feeling was not one of pain but of a sense of emptiness keeping all sorts of emotion in suspense. The bubble of an old worn-out life had just burst. Helpless crying, kicking and waving

of hands preceded the final act. A dull, unedifying, commonplace life was the background of these distressing cries. A terrible wretchedness stalked our land and enveloped millions of people. He was only one of them.

A revolutionary has to take stock now and then of the forces within and the forces without; the old man's execution was suggestive of a halting point, enjoining upon me to reassess the valuation I had placed on life. There was the continuous dream of my patriotic ambitions, of the beginning of an armed clash, the dawning of a fiery redness in the eastern horizon, the dream of victory and freedom. The fight had continued to gain momentum. The death sentence passed against me was proof of my being in the thick of the fight. The question that I now asked myself was, "What role have I to play here or, conversely, what bearing the deaths frequently occurring around me have on my dreams, on the revolution of my conception?"

The answer was chilling enough. The uninspiring life of these unfortunate beings was a real problem. It ultimately resolved itself into the general problem of giving a full, wholesome meaning to life.

The turn of a Sikh Jat had come. He thus addressed us all when they had taken him out of his cell:

"Hindu, Muslim, Sikh brothers! There is no God. Listen you, there is no God and you need not waste your time in prayer. I have thought much upon the subject and am certainly speaking the truth. I was the staunchest believer out of the whole lot up to the last night. I was innocent and prayed to Him for full five months here, day in and day out, to give me the benefit of my innocence. I depart from you forever. I warn you that there is no God on earth but an imaginary being exploiting our weaknesses."

His voice gave way and he could speak no further. The plank beneath him gave way a few minutes later and he was dangling at the end of the rope. The believers had not liked his words, but they had no chance to argue with him. All were painfully waiting to hear the thud of the falling plank.

There were touching reactions to his last speech. The believers hugged the name of God, their only support, closer and closer. They called Him louder and louder to let their hearts feel the certainty of His coming to their rescue. A void was created in the hearts assailed by doubt. They felt there could be no healing of the wounds inflicted by the terrible reality of their fate and the disillusionment consequent upon it. The dying man was

one of them in his last hour. He had done so much for God, Who had refused to respond. The idea was incomprehensible to the simple Jat. The wavering souls wavered more and fell into the imaginary lap of God. A care-free non-believer remarked, "No false hopes, no frustration."

He started me on a new line of thought. "It would have been better," I said to myself, "if the Jat had believed for a few hours more and died content. Only he who has some faint hope can believe. The desperate have no need, no use for God."

The Jat had been metamorphosed into a "Bania." He required compensation from God for his unceasing prayers. Such an unimaginative outlook was the cause of his downfall. He, however, had no need to conceal his reactions when he was no more to live, and tried to impose his ideas in an arbitrary fashion upon other prisoners in the cells.

After the execution Ramzan told me, "He was not himself, his voice had become unrecognisable. Formerly I had believed him to be a courageous man."

"How could he be natural, when his mainstay, his faith, had been shattered?" I said.

The poor looked to God not because of any intellectual craving for a better and deeper understanding of Him but because they had only Him to look to. The reality lay hidden from them that those who failed to benefit from life at the same time failed to benefit from God!

CHAPTER 9

THE VALUE OF AN ILLUSION

IT had grown colder, rather more dull. The lack of sunshine in the cells was like the lack of a genial atmosphere for those denied the open air. The clouds had been rare at first but they spread over the sky and the state of suspense continued. We could not see the sun all day. The evening brought depressing rain. I felt as though the world had shrunk to a dark patch. There was something unfamiliar and unnatural about it. Mine seemed to be the vague existence of a speck. The pulse of my thoughts continued to beat without taking me anywhere. My

soul today could not be satisfied with light thoughts and vague ideas and clamoured for clarity. I asked myself, "What is life for?"

Life is what we think, what we do, the incentives and the motives. I brought the past under review. It was unnecessary to tell myself what my life was for. I only thought of the limitations that were put in the way of its defined goal. We take from society and give it back its due. The struggle of our countrymen against slavery had defined the path for me. No one had led me on. I led myself. A faint idea had grown into a mature desire in the process of my growth from a child to a young man. I was certain that nothing could have held me back from the path I had chosen. I had not blundered into the jail. Actually there was no deliberate seeking after death but I attached importance enough to my duty to realise that a deliberate death was by all means preferable to one by chance, after a life lived with will and energy and in accordance with the laws of struggle was not a bad thing at all. Why we should depend on chance and not guide ourselves in a matter of such tremendous significance to ourselves, was incomprehensible to me. These ideas were not new as they had occurred to me before on different occasions under different circumstances. I knew now that my days were numbered. Being satisfied with the past or having no feeling of regret in the present could do away with the certain impression my surroundings made upon me. This idea was crossing my mind again and again that day.

"My ambitions have been cut short, and active thinking in terms of future work and progress brought to a slow pace."

I was no longer a dark speck but a conscious being trying to rend the cloak of surrounding darkness and issue out of it with will and force.

The rain had narrowed the boundaries of my world as well as damped my ambitions. I suffered from the suffocating lack of atmosphere. I tried to find out the reasons for my depressed state of mind. It was not any anxiety about death nor any care about the remaining days of my life, that had imperceptibly crept into my mind. It occurred to me at last that I was suffering from want of interest. I began to turn the pages of the book which had been sent to me that day. It was *The Book of Life* by Upton Sinclair, the following passage in which set my imagination aflame. I felt lifted up out of the gloom as I read:

"So I say unto you that if you want to find happiness in this life, look with distrust upon all absolutes and ultimates, all hard and fast rules ; all formulae and dogmas and ' general principles.' Bear in mind that there are many complications in every human being, there are many sides to every question. Try to keep an open mind and an even temper. Try to take an interest in learning something new every day and in trying some new experiment. This is the scientific attitude towards life."

The insidious logic of the place, the lazy reflection of physical and mental environment which had crept into my consciousness, was dispelled by a vigorous stream of wholesome and refreshing thoughts. The words of another had the effect of broadening my vision in relation to various controversial issues such as patriotism, the duty of fighting the exploiters of our masses, blind hatred against imperialism, violence and the spirit of revenge, in which I was interested deeply. The underlying idea of seeing the many sides of a problem, of gaining experience and adding to the lights of life, proved to be the source of much valuable thought and pleasure.

"How was the murder done?" "Who did it?" "How was such and such person arrested?" "What foolish mistakes brought about his conviction?" Such were the questions mooted about amongst the condemned prisoners and I had been lately losing interest in the answers voiced aloud by them. The arrest and the circumstances under which it took place were the only mishap for the majority. Someone could not dispose of the dead body in a "proper" way ; another boasted of having destroyed all proofs of murder. A few would admit the faults in their plans. One of them talked about new devices for committing murders with absolute impunity, another counted aloud on his fingers the murders he was going to commit. The majority were unhewn, irregular, rough specimens of village life with little tendency to probe into their hearts. The good in them had never had the chance to come out. They were too full of hatred and revenge to regret their criminal deeds. Pent up with false pride, they overlooked the degrading aspect of murder and talked glibly about the cruelties they had inflicted on others. They lacked interest in morality, education of themselves, better living, in short. I began to give more time to them and less to books.

A condemned Pathan prisoner remarked one day, "Had there

been men like you with us, we would have given a smashing blow to the Government."

He had narrated to me the "heroic" tale of several dacoities he had committed. He made out that all his deeds bore a great political significance. I had to labour persistently for many days in order to impress my point of view upon him. He understood at last the difference between political work and his exploits as a dacoit of renown, and showed much surprise.

Faizullah was his name. The next day again I went to see him and he humbly declared, "I was on the wrong side, my friend. I am no longer proud of my evil deeds . . . but why could no man on earth come forward to tell me these things before?"

He was in a state of utter prostration, completely dissatisfied with his past. The only pleasure he felt was in talking to me in a repentant mood, invoking the wrath of God and man upon himself; otherwise he remained melancholy and uncommunicative.

He had only a few days more to live and I felt I had committed another enormous blunder within a short period. I was very sorry. I thought, "I have made him conscious of his crimes. Now he cannot be content. The edifice of his vanity had been shattered, the stronghold of his will had fallen. What a tragedy that he is no more self-complacent and happy."

Faizullah was of too generous a heart to blame me for his unhappy state of mind. He continued to take interest in my ideas till his end. He might have been a great asset to the political life of our country, had he not been hanged.

CHAPTER 10

"DO NOT JUDGE ME FROM THIS SINGLE DEED!"

"WHERE are you going?" I asked Bishan Singh, another fellow-prisoner, one morning when he was being fettered in the courtyard of our ward.

"To see the world for the last time," replied he in a matter-of-fact tone. He was to appear in the High Court that day.

"There is no occasion for such pessimism," I said by way of suggestion, and added, "the judges may quash your sentence,

as there are always flaws in such cases."

He smiled amiably and replied, "There can be no flaws in my case. I have done nothing. I mean to say that I have done nothing on my own behalf. It was all for another's sake and I only pocketed a sum of money for my labours."

He gave me another smile more bold and frank. I wanted to hear his story as there was yet time for him to be taken to the court and the police guard had not arrived.

He complied with my wish and recounted the tale of the murder he had committed. "I had been a public man once and had suffered imprisonment in the days of the Akali movement, but now I have come as a hired murderer." He went on without taking his eyes off me, "How heinous it is to murder another without anger, without grievances, without a real cause for enmity, but I did it."

I was a bit anxious at the mood of confession fast developing in him, but his contrition was not verging upon despair. There was a great difference between what he said and what he looked. Not crestfallen in the least, he spoke like a man of will and strength in a rare mood of frankness. He said, "I have never told the story to anyone but you and I am giving you nothing but unalloyed truth. My deed was the most degrading thing in my life. I had some pressing monetary needs, but the people all the world over are similarly hard-pressed and yet do not resort to murders. Do not judge me from this single deed. I am not a bad man by nature. The woman who gave me money was an old, helpless widow. I had no notion of being an unprincipled murderer and only thought of giving help to a widow."

Ramzan now came to handcuff him and our head warder handed him over to the police guard.

He had been in the condemned cells for several months but he never talked to me in so familiar a way as he did that day. His words spelt hope and confidence in the future. "How could he, an old political worker, become involved in a cold-blooded murder like that?" I thought.

He returned from the court in the evening. I was standing in the courtyard as he came chatting freely with the warders of the jail. He seemed to be in the best of spirits. Coming nearer he smiled at me and I thought his appeal had been accepted. "Have they announced the judgment?" I enquired.

"It will be done in a day or two," replied he with perfect equanimity.

"The case is hopeful," I suggested.

He looked interestingly out of his widow-opened eyes and replied, "The case is quite clear and the judgment is as much as announced ; they will reject my appeal. We the villagers, do not give a good impression at least at the first sight. My rough appearance and brusque manners were not congenial to the mind of the urbane judges."

I said nothing and he went on, "I saw my counsel, a compatriot who was with me in the days of the Akali movement. He had been, contrary to the spirit of his profession, very sympathetic to me during the trial of my case. He saw me, remarked nothing, went outside and did not return to the court room."

"The role of a friend and a lawyer combined was not a comfortable one for him," I observed.

Back under lock and key in his cell, he stood silent for a moment. I felt the idea must have come to him that he had seen the last of the free world and was now to leave his cell only for the gallows. I was keenly surprised at this remark, "I do not regret life."

"There was no mission before me to fulfil," he went on, "I was just like millions and millions who have no well-defined aim whatever. I am happy to meet you. There are only a few days more, but that does not depress me."

A condemned prisoner gets twenty-one days for mercy petitions after the confirmation of his sentence by the High Court. Some file appeals in the Privy Council with the obvious purpose of prolonging their life for two or three months more, but usually no hope is left for them when the High Court rejects their appeal. I had seen men whose voices had failed them and who could not speak a single sentence in a normal way. They begin to count their days and can think of nothing except God and death.

Bishan Singh was informed the next day that his appeal had been rejected. He was in good spirits and in a friendly mood, and expressed a desire to know about my ideas and my work in the Party.

I was in a practical dilemma. Could I repeat the mistake I had made in Faizullah's case? He saw my hesitation and guessed the probable reason behind it. He was sympathetic and bold like Faizullah but he was conscious of his guilt while the latter was not. "Go on with your story without any hesitation. It could do no harm to me," he asserted politely with full confidence in his fearlessness about death.

"Do you believe in religion, in 'Paths'?" I asked while thinking out the method of putting things before him.

He replied, "I am a believer but not interested in 'Paths' and repetitions and monotonous things. I do not think I am spiritually high enough to take comfort in contemplation of the Eternal Being, but I do believe in Him. I realise that He exerts a great influence over our thoughts. I am interested in your views and ideals and shall be content rather than be depressed after hearing about them. My crime, I feel, was prompted by my baser self and had been, in face of my imminent death, already pardoned by God. I can assure you that a better man listens to what you have to say. Please go on."

His talk was of a free man, his thoughts of a fortunate soul. He slept a blessed sleep and ate normally like a healthy manual labourer. He was in possession of exceptional self-control.

I gave him as much time as I could, and he wanted to have as much political knowledge as could be had in the few days left to him. His interest was amazing because of the position he was in. The last days of a condemned prisoner fly very rapidly with a speed which is felt keenly and absorbed painfully. One does not simply wait for death, but flies towards it with all his senses aflame. Bishan Singh was fully conscious of this hastening aspect of time. He seemed to be avoiding the pull at his heart, his limbs and muscles, with the counter-force of his will. He stood resolute and firm because he had the spirit of a brave opponent. To give in before death actually came was not in his grain.

Both of his mercy petitions had been rejected and I asked, "What now?"

"Everything is happening according to my expectation. It is just what I thought was to be."

"Do you wish to die?" I asked.

"The death is an enforced one, you know. I am prepared because there is nothing else to do."

"What do you think will happen to you?" he enquired.

"I think and feel without any illusions and hopes about the commutation of my sentence," I replied.

"Do you brood much over your death?" he asked with a melancholy look in his eyes. I told him, "The idea of death comes to me but I do not let it overwhelm my thoughts. I take more interest in others than in myself whether alone or in the company of fellow-prisoners."

Bishan Singh was not satisfied with my answer. He very wisely observed, "But the idea of death comes in the midst of thoughts about different people, between the lines of a book,

between two morsels of the prisoner's bread. What are your reactions at such moments? "

I was surprised at his intelligent way of reading into the psychology of another and replied with the gravity his question demanded, "The occasional thinking of death has become an old habit with me ever since my arrest. I had a presentiment of dying for a good cause, even before I had become a member of the Party. Coming into the jail, my first curiosity was to see the place of execution. I have contrived to visit the place several times, so that it might not cause a feeling of surprise at the time of my hanging. I have always made conscious efforts to be familiar with death. I know all the details of hanging. Death by the rope is the easiest, as one is finished without suffering any pain in a fraction of a minute. I shall not take it as a forced death meted out to a helpless prisoner, but as the natural end long expected. I always try to think of it in an easy and care-free way."

"That is exactly the attitude we ought to adopt," he replied with evident satisfaction.

No one came to interview him though he had his wife and many relatives. A Sub-Inspector of police went to his village to inform the members of his family about the date of his execution, so that they may have an interview with him before that.

Only one man came, his real uncle. Stopping in front of his cell, he began to cry and shed tears. It was Bishan Singh's first and last interview. He had cast a glance outside in expectation of someone else turning up but none else came. He understood without being upset. The uncle went on crying while the nephew remained quite at ease and carried on a normal conversation. He exclaimed sullenly at last, "What is the use of this outburst of emotion? Do not set a bad example before me! Talk without fear! I am not afraid of death. I do not even believe that they shall hang me. Why should I be sorry when I can't help it? There are innocent boys in these cells waiting for execution but they do not care at all. Why should I, who has seen more than forty years of life, and committed a crime more heinous than anyone else confined here? Do not weep for me whose is a genuine case for hanging! "

Bishan Singh had asked me to be present at this interview. I felt awkward standing there as the spectator of an old misery and despair. I had moved away a little when Bishan Singh cried aloud, "Do not go, please stay for a while more! You were here and I felt much composed. We seem to gain courage

at the mere sight of each other."

I was deeply moved by his words though I knew there was nothing inspiring in me to add to the courage he already possessed. He went on in the same breath, "I consciously try to reflect back the good that accrues to me from you." He added after a pause, "You will be locked inside your cell in less than a couple of hours and I won't be able to see you again. Do not forget that it is my last interview with you."

His glowing words made me see him in a new light, washed clean of all darkness that had once entered his soul and filled him with unclean ideas of money and murder!

He enquired from his uncle about his wife. "What about Preman? Why has she not come?"

"Consider her to be dead long since. She is no more for you," replied the uncle pathetically.

"Tell me the truth about my wife," insisted Bishan Singh, adding, "I become more resolute when I see the reality."

The uncle's face betrayed an agonising suspense. The nephew persisted encouragingly,

"Out with the truth, your silence about her can do nothing but keep me annoyed for the few hours I have to live."

Prodded on, the uncle told him, amidst occasional outbursts of tears, that she was quite hale and hearty and had come with him from the village to Lahore. The uncle further informed him that she had her lover with her and he could not say where they were now, as they were thinking of marrying.

The old man stopped short. He could in fact have told him nothing more terrible. I felt it was too much for the unfortunate man, and had not the heart to look at his face and observe how he took the news. I slipped out of the small courtyard with a painful feeling in my heart and went inside my cell.

The uncle went away weeping. I heard Bishan Singh call a minute or two later and went to see him. The uncle had thrown more than a bombshell in the face of the nephew but I saw no visible effects of the catastrophe upon him. He stood with his hands upon the bars of the door and told me with exceptional calmness, "I do not know why my mind yet refuses to admit that I am to be hanged tomorrow. I am blessed in this, that I experience no pangs of heart. I think my wife has settled things for herself and there is no need to be anxious about her future. Advise me whether I should bequeath half of my property to the Gurdwara in our village leaving the other half to my uncle."

We were yet talking when the Assistant Superintendent came to write the will of Bishan Singh.

I met him again before my lock-up, for the last time. The spirit of forgiveness in him was unmistakably genuine. He was expressing his actual feelings when he said, "It is a great burden off my mind. In this vast world, none but Preman depended upon me, but she has been able to make arrangements for herself. She too is a human being. Had I committed the murder for a good cause, I might have severely censured her conduct and felt insulted and betrayed. It is now easy for me to forgive her completely. Had she only come to see me for the last time, I would have given her my property in spite of the knowledge that she was thinking of marrying another. I would have done this good act in your presence."

He heartily shook hands with me. Neither of us betrayed emotion at this final farewell, but I knew within me that there had taken place the most difficult parting I had ever had in my life.

He immediately began to walk in his cell as I left. Very early in the morning I sent the warder on duty before my cell to convey my "Sat-Sri-Akal" to him. He sent word through the warder, "I am bathing and shall finish in a few minutes. They have taken charge of my clothes and given me the black dress to wear after the bath. It lies near me. There are also lying the ropes and the handcuffs with which they will fasten my shoulders and hands. The guard that will escort me to the scaffold is patrolling in front of the cells. There are about a hundred minutes more, but believe me, I still feel no certainty of death for myself. I cannot explain the basis for such an illusion, and can only call it a strange mood of mine. I am not a bad man and hope you would believe me. My good wishes to you! Good-bye!"

I regretted his death very much and could think of nothing but him, his courage, his fortitude, his passion for moral and intellectual improvement. Given proper education and a healthy environment, he might never have had a criminal inclination all his life. The same could be said about the majority of the condemned prisoners. Society, I realised, had never been in earnest about tackling the problem of crime. It provided no redeeming influence to criminals and only knew the short-cut of catching and hanging them. The result was that the problem had gone from bad to worse. One murder brought another in its chain and vendettas prevailed where peace should have reigned.

The retaliatory measures of society reacted against itself. It was only ridiculous to throw an overwhelming burden of responsibility upon the individual and completely absolve the society which was fully responsible for the conduct of its members. Would it ever come to realise the worth of human coins of intrinsic golden quality like Faizullah and Bishan Singh whom it had unwillingly thrown into the dirt? Was not any appreciation due to them?

CHAPTER 11

THE MAGNETISM OF DEATH

NO one in the condemned cells could escape the questions and counter-questions regarding death! Another might put the questions one did not ask oneself. We provided one and the same interest to all. Anyone who came to see us had a silent questioning aspect about him. Our comrades when they came to see us showed an unexpressed anxiety about our fate. The decision on our appeal which was to be made known within a month, or so stimulated thoughtfulness in our comrades, the depth of whose feelings could be gauged from the most tender consideration they showed us in respect of most common things.

Pandit Rupchand one day asked me, "What should it mean to a revolutionary?"

"Death for a revolutionary is synonymous with courage, courage over which reason can have no weakening influence," I replied.

Such questions were rare but they were asked and even discussed at length.

Lala Sham Lal came for an interview one day. He said, "I think I shall win the case if there are no executions." He further told us that there was the chance that the Judges might differ and deliver separate judgments, in which case a third Judge was to decide the appeal and give the final judgment. He also informed us that there was every likelihood of both the Judges passing strictures against the police.

Lalaji's gout had become more painful and his general health had greatly deteriorated. We urged upon him to try a fruit diet.

but the difficulty was that he ate nothing that other members of his family did not eat. He moreover considered fruit regimen, milk diet and other suggestions of the sort as luxuries befitting the idle rich. A story among others characteristic of him, told to us by the comrades who were on bail during our trial, was that he usually took two vegetables at each morning and evening meal but if there was only one cooked some day, his wife would put it in two dishes and Lalaji would feel quite satisfied that he had eaten two vegetables. He would not think of himself until the defence of our case was at an end.

Amrik Singh was optimistic just as I was realistic. He seldom thought of any other chance except that of his acquittal, whereas I expected nothing but the confirmation of my capital sentence. The interview with Lalaji had raised no doubt in his mind. He talked with the comrades about his post-release programme. He was apparently unaffected by the continuous talk of death around him, though he occasionally thought of boldly meeting his death if it came, and on rare occasions even admitted that there was a slight chance of the confirmation of our sentences.

Our friends amongst the condemned prisoners too, were uncommon. One of them, a wrestler from Baghbanpura, a suburb of Lahore, was a great friend of his. I had had only casual talks with him on rare occasions, but later on I came to be attached to him in bonds of friendship.

He had only wrestled in the early days of his youth and then even not in the capacity of a professional, yet the appellation of Pahlwan stuck to his name because of his sleek appearance. He was charged with the murder of a Hindu moneylender. His wife, his mother, and his brother were also arrested in this connection. His mother-in-law was acquitted by the Sessions Court, while his wife turned approver in the case. In other words she had given evidence against her husband, her mother and brother. The brother, Chiragh Din by name, was a college student, now under sentence of death in these cells along with his brother-in-law Aziz, the wrestler.

Aziz had borrowed and borrowed from the moneylender till the sum amounted to a little more than a thousand rupees, when he realised that he could never repay it.

The moneylender, a cloth-hawker by occupation, visited Pahlwan's house and demanded the return of his money. Chiragh Din happened to be there one day, on a visit to his sister, when the moneylender turned up. The Pahlwan told his brother-in-law, "It is good you are here by chance. We ought to finish

this usurer who is constantly plaguing us with his demand." The youth agreed and the cloth-hawker was put to death after a few minutes of his entry into the house.

The Pahlwan was neither a criminally disposed person nor a vagabond, but he had committed a heinous crime. He had many friends and relatives in the city who came to see him in the jail. He was a good talker, a man of many social qualities suggestive of a non-communal bent of mind, but the good traits of his character were offset by an intrinsic weakness that could only be ill-described by the word 'courageless'. The murder he had committed resulted in a complete disintegration of his family, uprooting of family traditions, loyalty and sentiments of relationship and left him bankrupt of all those binding links which make one's life worth living.

He was ashamed of his deliberate and foolish crime, and became depressed and worried after the rejection of his appeal by the High Court. He had committed the murder because at that time, the pressing monetary question had become foremost in his mind. He planned it without thinking of the consequences. His mind had not been working in a healthy way for a long while. He sought a way out of his oppressive environment: family worries and the like. It was like a mad man cutting his bonds with a knife. He might have had a temporary relief from the worries of life, but there was no relief for him now from the worries of death. What an unhappy man he was! He might never have been here; poverty brought him along. There are men who can think healthily even under wretched conditions, there are others who cannot. The difference can be better understood in the background of the bad living which is the lot of the average man of our country.

"There are no extenuating circumstances in my case. I ruined the life of Chiragh Din, the budding youth who but for me would never have soiled his hands with murder." What drives me to despair is that there is not a single redeeming feature in my crime," he cried bitterly one day, in an unusually self-reproachful mood.

"There is one, for example, of poverty," I said by way of consolation. "Would you have felt an urge to murder for money's sake under better economic conditions?" I asked.

My question surprised him a bit. He had found some consolation by understanding its implication which I tried to make more clear for him. He evinced some interest in the social and economic conditions of our country but it was not possible for

him to divert his attention fully from death to life. He had gone too far towards the former.

He met his end at the gallows ; while Chiragh Dín's sentence was commuted to that of fourteen years.

" *There are men who ought to be eliminated from society,*" said the old chief warder of the jail to me one day. He was talking about the enormous increase of crime nowadays.

" *There were only five condemned cells in the year 1896, when I joined the service, but now these forty cells are quite insufficient and we have to lodge the remaining condemned prisoners in No. 14 Old. Crime provokes crime, murder calls for murder, revenge breeds revenge. Nor were the prisoners under our charge then so retaliatory as they are nowadays,*" he observed sententiously.

The chief warder was waiting these days for his retirement orders. One of his duties was to attend to the execution arrangements. He had during his long service seen thousands of hangings and only dealt with criminals and crimes. His words were perfectly true though they sounded strange coming from his lips. He had the appearance of an executioner ; but he was a good old man, kind at heart and mild in his dealings with prisoners.

" *The laws are more brutal than men,*" was his parting remark.

The punitive and retributory impulses of those in power must have some wholesome check, I thought. Why does not society do anything about those delinquents who only need a better environment to become good citizens?

CHAPTER 12

SUDDEN UPSURGE OF SELF-INTEREST

THE winter had gone. It was the warm season again. The sun's rays fell directly on the cemented cells in the summer ; while in the winter they peeped in for a while in the morning and a while in the evening caring little for the inmates whose bodies and hearts were cold. I had seen prisoners with long hair, especially Sikhs, stand for hours to catch the slanting rays of the sun coming through the ventilator. Inadequacy of blankets and warm clothing had not been an unusual complaint because

cold draughts had free access into the cells through barred doors and ventilators.

I had to discard the clothing which had become irksome because of the heat, but the mosquitoes would not let me sleep. They interfered with my studies and were more insistent callers than the warders on duty who called the condemned prisoners every three hours in the night and would go on calling till each man gave a hint of his being alive. One might have been ill, one might have fallen asleep only a few minutes before, but the warder was bound to awaken him. He might have been abused by an enraged prisoner, but the abuse is a sign of life and he had to take it if no other was forthcoming.

"*Bol Jawan*" and shaking of the locks continued all night. I had become used to all such noises, but not to mosquitoes. I was in fact neither keen on studies nor interested in sleep. My mind was in everything and nothing. Uncertainty about the future was the real cause of the restlessness I was experiencing.

The judgment was expected on the 22nd of May and it was the night of the 20th. I could not be calm now until I knew for certain my fate. I had been lately informed by our defence counsel and our comrades that there was every likelihood of our sentences being reduced. No uneasiness existed in my mind at the time of the Special Tribunal's judgment because there was no uncertainty about it. A sudden upsurge of interest in myself was for me something strange and unexpected, but nevertheless, true and real.

Our relatives and friends had gone to the High Court to hear the judgment which was expected to be pronounced before twelve o'clock. We were to be informed of it at our interview which was to take place at about one o'clock.

The Assistant Superintendent-in-charge waited in his office for our relatives and at last came to the ward when they did not come. He took his seat upon a chair in front of my cell and we began to talk. Amrik Singh also came and stood beside us.

The decision must be unfavourable, otherwise our relatives would have come, I concluded, and was annoyed at their delay in telling us the truth. Amrik Singh too seemed to have formed a similar opinion. I saw that he was in a wavering mood. His natural optimism was not evident now.

The Assistant Superintendent also remarked, "It is always best to be prepared for the worst." He had said an excellent thing, the wisest counsel he could give us. Three opinions concurred now, and resulted in having a lively effect upon our hitherto

lagging conversation. It was about five o'clock and there was little hope of anyone coming to see us so late.

Amrik Singh's vacillating mood which I had seen for the first time during our stay in the condemned cells was gone and his features showed relaxation and easiness of mind. He declared in a firm and resolute voice with the least uncertainty about him, "The choice of the date of execution should be left to the prisoner when he is willing to be hanged earlier than the date fixed by the Government! I for myself would like no delay between the confirmation and the carrying out of the sentence."

The Assistant Superintendent remarked, laughing good-naturedly, "Your suggestion is based no doubt on humanitarian grounds; but it is more ideal than practical."

I was in complete agreement with my brother over this. Our unanimity struck me as amusing. The idea of his death suddenly got hold of my mind. Strangely enough I had never thought of the confirmation of his sentence and had been most unreasonably optimistic about his fate, as I had been most pessimistic about mine. There was no end to my sympathy for him. The emotion that welled up all at once in me had washed away the consciousness of my being. It was not only a brotherly feeling, because it had never been very strong in me, but something bigger than that, signifying a unity of purpose in life and death. He talked with the Assistant Superintendent, while I communed with myself on things impersonal and sublime.

The Assistant Superintendent rose to go. The warder on duty took out his bunch of keys to lock us in, when my eyes caught sight of our relatives coming to our ward. Men, women, and children swarmed into the courtyard of my cell and sat down on the ground. My flushed face seemed to be giving sparks of smiles while our eldest brother, S. Kartar Singh, was describing in detail how they had gone to the High Court and waited and waited for the judgment, which happened to be delivered late. He continued to give uninteresting details without immediately telling us the real thing. He informed us at last that Amrik Singh was acquitted. A powerful wave of joy ran through me. He then gave the names of those who had been sentenced to transportation for life. My number was sixth or seventh as the sentences were announced in alphabetical order. I knew at last that my sentence had been commuted to that of transportation for life. I would have preferred death; but the immediate feeling was not of unhappiness, firstly because of my deep-felt satisfaction at Amrik Singh's release, and secondly because of the persistence

of the impersonal mood I was in, before the arrival of our relatives.

I began to think more clearly after they had gone away. I had never believed in a lingering life. Old age was not to my liking ever since my childhood days. I wanted to die before health, adventure, and ambition, the three pivots of life, were affected by age. The imprisonment for life was a direct contradiction of my conception of life and its principles. I could hardly adjust my mind to what had become a reality for me. The prisoner's was an idle, helpless, beggarly life holding out nothing to live for. The world was moving fast while I was to be thrown like a stone into a dark corner—for ever.

Amrik Singh was released on the 25th. I could not now meet and talk light-heartedly with the prisoners whose death sentences were confirmed though I had the feeling of genuine friendship for many of them. I vowed to try to obtain mitigation of the sufferings of the condemned prisoners whenever I got the chance. Some of them keenly felt about losing my company. I left the condemned prisoners' ward on the 30th of May 1934, after having remained there for about five and a half months.

PART III

CHAPTER I

MUCH POORER !

THE small iron door of Ward No. 14 Old opened again to let me in. One or two of my comrades welcomed and embraced me with a frenzied joy that made me realise to what an extent they had considered me as lost. I laughed and smiled and talked. Nevertheless, it was not possible for me immediately to become my former self again. I had lost the integrity of a well-attuned heart. An imaginary link-up with the greatest purpose of my life had given place to a dull, vague and gloomy mental prospect. I was conscious of the trick that had been played upon me, in taking away from me the initiative of death and giving a skeleton of a life in its place. The greater part of me was still in the company of the death-awaiters with whom I had been associated for the past five and a half months. My comrades carried on a conversation without visualising any unreality about it. . . . Their continued interest in me reminded me of the need for a corresponding interest in them.

Death for me was one supreme effort for the liberation of the country, a satisfactory feeling bordering upon anxiety, a poised state before the blind plunge into the fathomless ; it had its concomitant of relief, the end of all responsibility. It appeared to me that life was going to be a much poorer thing. . . . I remembered the views of Pandit Chandrashekhar Azad about prison life, as well as the fact that he always kept two loaded pistols with him so that he might die fighting and never be captured alive. His attitude was in complete agreement with the significant words once uttered by Lala Sham Lal,

“ It is easy to die, but difficult to carry on with a sustained effort all through one's life ! ”

The switch-over from death to life meant the carrying on of a continuous, cumbersome, meaningless struggle in captivity ; the circumstances had forced upon me the duty of giving a meaning to the meaningless, a shape to the shapeless, an expres-

sion to the expressionless . . . the life of a prisoner had begun for me that day.

As I lay upon my bed in the open courtyard of our ward, I could see the starry expanse and hear the voices, the broken, unrecognisable and tragically similar voices, of the condemned prisoners coming from their abodes. They were as usual lightening the burden of their hearts by calling one another, and carrying on a disjointed talk. The voices continued to reach me like sparks summing up their life and then vanishing. I recognised some of them that carried more fire.

The comrades slept early in order to rise early with the object of beginning the prison-labour as soon as it was given to them and finishing it before the time of the morning meal. They had been making envelopes before, but nowadays cardboards were given them to paste. It was a light *moshagqat* (labour) though by no means clean. They finished it in about three hours, bathed and then ate their food.

In the morning I saw them doing team-work. Some folded boards, others pasted them, and a few spread them to dry in the sun. I did all sorts of work in order to learn the technique. The task was not a laborious one because a good many of us knew the technique of turning it into fun. The herd instinct was at work. There was an all-round warmth of feeling, as if we had undertaken a joint enterprise and were feeling well launched into it. Hearts were knit together under the shadow of separation hanging above us. Our appeal was decided and the jail authorities saw no reason in keeping us together after this. We could be transferred to different jails any of these days now. It was difficult to say whether once parted we would ever meet again. Each morning made us doubtful of the evening's state of affairs. Increasing mutual regard made the coming separation more difficult and the companionship we were enjoying more precious. The days passed speedily because we had the illusion of advancing together towards a certain limit. We talked of our future programme. The short-term prisoners pledged themselves to the service of the motherland. The ideology of terrorism was under constant review, more so because of the realisation of the difficulties they would face in approaching the masses after their release from jail. The long-term prisoners were equipping themselves with the material for future studies. I bought several new volumes of English poetry and essays in addition to Tagore's works, but would not read a single page, wishing to go through the books other comrades had bought. The books in my possession

were coveted in the same way by others. We found uncommon satisfaction in studies, in mutual discussions, and in collective labour. Life, to our wonder, had demonstrated its power of creating new values with the changing circumstances and could no more be looked upon as 'a melancholy perspective when the stress and strain of giving it a workable basis was uppermost in our minds.

My relatives and friends showed uncommon sympathy and consideration in these days. Interviews were regularly and punctually held. One day one of my relatives could not for some reason come to see me and wrote a letter of apology, "How long could such niceties last?" was the question that naturally occurred to me. The letter was significant enough since it marked the beginning of a new period of our life in which the links with the outer world were to break one by one.

My relative's heart was roused to pity. He was too sympathetic to take a long-range view of our life. I expressed this idea without being cynical about the letter and showed it to Pandit Rupchand who was also amused by its contents.

"What is the long-range view, pray?" he asked, with an express desire for argument.

"Action was our sole concern while outside. Captivity must provoke thought of a clear and wholesome kind," I suggested.

"What did you think during your stay in the condemned cells, especially about terrorism?" he asked.

The topic had lately been the subject of continuous discussion amongst the majority of us. I had to confess that I did not think much about it in the condemned cells. "We could apply the principles of terrorism to the conditions outside, but it can never be raised to the status of a philosophy of life, particularly that of a long-term prisoner."

Pandit Rupchand felt I was not in a mood for discussion; but the subject of my reactions as a condemned prisoner was not yet exhausted between us and he persisted with more questions.

"What would you have told Faizullah, Bishan Singh or any others like them to do if they had been released?"

The questions he asked invariably brought us back again to the subject of terrorism. We could not evade the self-analysis that the circumstances had enforced upon us. Terrorism was not a philosophy that could be openly preached and propagated amongst the masses. The most that could be said about it was that it was based upon the righteous indignation of individuals best suited to act in a vigorous way. It was essentially the creed of

a select few. I did not enlist a single member for the Party because of an inborn disinclination to demand the extreme sacrifice from those who could be nothing more than casual acquaintances ; but the desire to have as many men on our side as we could was not lacking. The real reason behind my disinclination was not clear to me then. It had to do with our method of approach, which was the indirect one of setting an example before others. We could take the people along with us if we could suffer, and suffer bravely, without showing the slightest weakness during all the stages of a revolutionary's career. The logic behind our actions was this: "Act so that others may act similarly out of their own free will." In this way only would those capable of extreme sacrifice have come out into the field.

"We thought more of death than of life, which fact alone is sufficient to explain all our actions," observed Pandit Rupchand.

"We are forced to think more and more of life ; that is what I mean by taking a long-range view," I explained.

A friend of mine who had with much difficulty secured a job in a sugar mill in the United Provinces rushed to Lahore even at the risk of dismissal when he heard the news of my life sentence. He however knew that the jail authorities would hardly allow him an interview with me. A couple of days were wasted by him in trying to obtain the necessary permission, which was refused as anticipated. My friend realised then that he could do nothing but return to his post. I took it as a bad sign for future relationship with the outer world. All exaggerated expressions of sympathy made me think more and more realistically about them. This withdrawing from the outer world was in response to an urge for relying more and more upon inner resources.

On the night of the 15th June 1934, it rained continuously with unabated fury. Many of the cells were wet with showers coming through the barred ventilators. The atmosphere inside was sultry and we could not sleep. The rain stopped at about four in the morning when I came out and began to walk upon the raised platform in front of our cells. It was still dark. Suddenly the Deputy Superintendent entered the ward through the small iron-gate and began to shout merrily, "Wake up, wake up, be ready within an hour. Make haste all of you!"

He went on shouting thus from one end to the other. I wondered whether he was ordering us to a battlefield or simply asking us to prepare for a transfer to other jails, but the mood of deliverance in his tone was unmistakably clear. The jail staff

had always considered us an extra burden on their minds. The Deputy continued to exhort us with waving arms and dancing legs to make haste, and went away when his Assistant arrived to carry out his instructions.

Pandit Rupchand was still fast asleep in his cell, knowing nothing about the uproar outside. I called him aloud from outside his cell to arise. "The big *peepal* tree has been washed away by the rain," I told him, but he would not believe me. Other comrades arrived to confirm my news. He came out urged by curiosity and found to his surprise that a heap of luggage was lying under the *peepal* tree. The joke was only too true. He laughed as though he were still half-asleep.

All our luggage was being taken out of the cells. We collected our books and began to pack our belongings. The officer-in-charge commenced the search of our property in an oversuspicious way common to his class. He examined each and every article carefully, sounded and tapped books, removed their covers and objected to our keeping those which had been already censored and passed. We had to dispute again and again his right to withhold things legally allowed. The search was finished at last; but the dispute over the legality and illegality of things continued till he was convinced that we had nothing objectionable with us.

We had to depart at about eleven in batches of twos and threes. There was the elderly Malik Nathu Ram who would not look at any one of us full in the face for fear of bursting into tears. He might not have been able to check his emotion, had I spoken a word or two in an emotional strain. He stood restless and mute with a khadi bag hung over his shoulder. He had been in the Congress while he was a mere youngster of thirteen or fourteen, had taken part in the Rawalpindi Riots of 1907 and had again shared the sufferings of Congressmen in the 1922 movement. A brave old soul he was whom no hardship nor suffering could make unhappy; but his heart overflowed with love and sympathy for his compatriots. He bowed his head a little and went away without embracing me as others did. The younger ones parted after hearty handshakes, embraces and exchanges of touching words.

By noon all were gone except four of us, *viz.*, Pandit Rupchand, Malik Kundan Lal, Jahangiri Lal and I, the "Lifers." The officer-in-charge informed us that our transfer would take place later on. We thought they would send us to the Andamans and were only waiting for the completion of the arrangements

in that connection. Our luggage still lay scattered in the courtyard but we did not wish to take it back into our cells. Heaps of articles such as clothes, utensils, furniture which did not belong to the Government but were our private property, had to be disposed of. We requested the jail authorities to send them to an orphanage. With them went things we required daily, such as clothes and bedding, which fact became known to us only a day later.

We did not go into our cells but sat together talking till late in the night and then went to sleep. The next day brought no transfer orders for us and we were asked to shift to the rear of the ward where condemned prisoners were kept. It was a row of ten cells, all of which were made vacant in order to enforce our segregation. The cells were exceptionally unclean because of the day and night locking-in of the condemned prisoners. Here were neither brick walls nor cemented floors like Ward No. 15. These mud-cells could be neither washed nor disinfected. Each of us placed his luggage in one and came out.

CHAPTER 2

THE LIMITED FEW!

WE began to lead an outdoor life as we were not yet reconciled to the idea of a transfer. We sat all day long under a *pecpal* tree, talking, reading or doing our daily labour. Day followed day, one resembling the other, and passed without creating any new interest for us. No one came to our place except the Superintendent on his weekly parade. We could call the jail warden on duty from the other side of the ward when required. We felt we were tending to become mute, calm, and uninteresting like the place of our confinement. No newspaper was allowed to us.

A month passed before we felt like settling down. We were ordered to make tags in place of pasting boards. It was skilled labour requiring patient practice. A prisoner who knew the art was sent to teach us how to hammer down pieces of tin and fix the thread in them. The assistant officer-in-charge of the jail factory came one day to see our progress in tag-making and told

us the news in private that we were to be sent to the Andamans within a month or two. This again made us feel unsettled.

Nobody had asked us whether we wanted to go to the Andamans or not. In the case of non-political lifers those only who volunteered to go there were transported. They could send us whether we were willing or not. The choice was with the Government. We learnt there were about four hundred terrorists in the Andamans, and tried to obtain information about the conditions in which they were placed. Some ordinary prisoners had recently returned from there and the news we obtained through them was heartening. Our comrades had facilities for reading, writing and games inside the cellular jail and were allowed newspapers too. We hungered for their society, which was only too desirable in view of the cramped atmosphere of the Lahore Jail where there was little chance of our associating with any other political or non-political prisoners. Ordinary prisoners were allowed to work for their livelihood in the penal settlement but the politicals were without any exception kept confined in the cellular jail. We also learnt of the difficulties they had to face, but the fact could not detract much from our enthusiasm to go and lead a settled life amongst the prisoners of our class.

The factory manager, an Englishman, came to see our workmanship one day. He looked carefully at the tags we had made and told us that we were improving satisfactorily. He came next day again and inspecting our tags remarked that they were all right except for a little defect in the rounding of their tips. He began to see our labour regularly and after refraining from finding any fault with it for five or six days again pointed out to us that we were not fixing the thread of the tags exactly in the centre of the tag. He indicated, every time he pointed out a defect, that our *moshaqqat* was very good on the whole and required only minor improvements. Tag-making was tedious and took more time than cardboard pasting. Our fingers were bruised and swollen by inexpert handling of the pieces of tin, but the patience of the factory manager had had its effect in the continued improvement of our work. He then asked us to increase the number of the tags we were making and gradually brought us to doing our full allotted task. What a keen observer of human nature that factory manager was! We might have refused to co-operate had he shown all the defects in our work the first time. We would have refused to work had he threatened to punish us for bad work any day. On occasions our work was bad and then one of us would forestall him by beginning to

praise the tags and he would agree without hesitation that they were all right. The regrettable fact was that he was an exception, an anachronism in the antiquated jail administration. He had come there on temporary duty and was gone after about two months. His psychological method of dealing with labouring prisoners was not followed by his successors.

The dull and slowly passing time, and the tedium of the changeless uninteresting life began to tell upon us. We were not living but vegetating. The jail officers did not trouble us. We were simply ignored, rather left alone. We could not know even if anyone had come to interview one of us and was refused permission. No news from the outside world ever leaked in to us. Months had passed without any occurrence, good or bad, big or small, agreeable or disagreeable, having its effect upon us. We spent our life without adding anything to it. It was like treading along a path which was never to end. We felt we could go on no matter whether our eyes were open or shut. Nothing but the sound of our own steps was audible all around. It was a real life imprisonment indeed! Why do they not send us to the Andamans, we asked ourselves.

The Superintendent informed us one day that it was not in his power to send us there, as the decision was to be taken by the Government without any previous reference to him.

Every morning reminded us of the burden of tag-making lying upon our shoulders. We tried to do away with it as soon as possible and felt greatly relieved when it was done. We had neither any interest in the labour nor in the few books in our possession already read by us. New books could not be had. The four of us had exhausted the stories we could tell one another, their passing on being of no exchange value any more. Our efforts to establish contact with the prisoners in the jail had so far borne no results.

We tried to be on familiar terms with the doctor who came on his daily round and passed by our cells to visit the prisoners in the Badmash Line, a row of cells somewhere in Ward No. 14 Old. The doctor began to stop now and then on his way thither and have a friendly chat with us. He proved to be an interesting personality with the gift of talkativeness we valued much.

He met the prisoners in the jail and helped us obtain information about the conditions in the Andamans. He would relate his experiences with prisoners and make observations about their general character. He talked of those called "Badmashes" some

of whom were confined in the Badmash Line. The word "Badmash" in the terminology of prisons means one who has the courage to defy a jail rule or challenge a prison official with or without any justification. At times the doctor would impart some news of the outside world to us. He was not a regular reader of newspapers, but he was not lacking in interest in the significant happenings in the country. He also took interest in what we read and advised us to choose a single subject and make it a hobby, but the suggestion could not be put into practice for want of required books.

"How do you propose to pass your life period?" he asked us one day.

"Our plans can be made only after reaching the Andamans," was the reply. The question naturally followed, "What, if they do not send you there?"

We could lead a regular life with a view to intellectual progress; that was the plan we could reasonably expect to carry out in the Andamans. In the meanwhile our efforts were limited to fighting monotony and pressing for necessary change. The garrulous little doctor showed little satisfaction with our answers. He usually put questions with the object of supplying answers to them. Flitting from subject to subject, he invariably came to medical science wherein he stood on unassailable ground. "Why don't you do some exercise for at least four hours, two in the morning, two in the evening, walking included?" he asked one day, exhorting us to be strong and healthy, vigorous and agile, by following his advice. "Begin today and tell me of the effects after a week," he added zealously. He had a brave way of meeting objections and evasive replies. "So much time at your disposal! O, it is simply a grand idea to improve your health. Thorough chewing can compensate for inadequacy of nourishment. Any green leaves can do regarding the vitamin. You shall never need any medicine. Well and good! All medicine is humbug after all!"

Pandit Rupchand had some trouble with his eyes. The doctor indicated lack of vitamin A and advised him to eat greens. "Any leaves would do," he said, "even those of the *shisham* tree in your ward."

He asked us to disbelieve in medicines, and related the story of vita-wheat to illustrate his point. "Vita-wheat" was advertised for long as a great invention in the medical field, as a builder of health and restorer of vitality, but was later on proved to be nothing more than whole-wheat rusk baked in a special

way in the oven.

The doctor was a brave little man always exhorting us to be up and doing. "What is revolution?" "Who is a revolutionary?" He would put such questions but never wait for our answers. He wanted us to let fall a word, so that he might utter a hundred.

He was not so unreservedly social when some prisoner from the Badmash Line called for him in the night. "The prisoner was a malingerer, a rogue," he would declare on his return and not stop before the cell of any one of us for a friendly chat. He was a good man at heart and would not adopt exactly the same methods that were resorted to by other jail doctors for checking night calls by the prisoners. Enema by force, whatever the complaint of a patient, was one of the measures adopted by the doctors. Not making any distinction between genuine and faked illness was responsible for much ill-feeling between the doctors and the prisoners.

One day we saw him go to the Badmash Line with a lambardar carrying the feeding apparatus, and asked, "Who is on hunger strike?"

"An old Badmash of the worst type," was his curt reply.

CHAPTER 3

RAM LAL, THE "BADMASH"

WE got the story of the hunger-striker from the warders and lambardars on duty in the Badmash Line. His name was Ram Lal, a State subject sentenced by a State court to transportation for life and by a British Indian court to eight years' rigorous imprisonment.

Ram Lal was a long, thin, weakly person without any hope of ever obtaining his freedom. He was given eighteen seers of wheat to grind on the morrow of the day of his entry into this jail. The authorities as a rule give hard *moshaqqat* to newcomers and had done nothing exceptional in his case, but he could not understand why a lifer should waste his energies in submitting to such a rigorous interpretation of the law, and refused to grind even a seer. He was given gunny clothes,

punishment diet, bar-fetters, and various other punishments one after the other, and at last the last weapon in the armoury of the jail officials—the cane—was employed. He was awarded thirty stripes, but the Superintendent, in consideration of the weak state of health of the prisoner, had to order cessation of the punishment after the fifteenth stripe. Ram Lal would rather have died than show the slightest weakness before the Superintendent.

Seeing that no weapons availed against him, they put permanent handcuffs on both his hands, placed him in a solitary cell and let him remain there for as long as he would not yield. He slept, ate, answered the calls of nature, put on his clothes and washed his iron cups with both his hands cuffed. At first he was confined in the punitive cells (*Siyasat Khana*) but was later on ordered to the Badmash Line. He remained in solitary confinement for about two years with the result that his already indifferent health was ruined completely. He had been under the charge of several officers one after the other but no one had been able to persuade him to do the grinding even for a few days. Repression had made him too hard of will to be any more amenable to persuasion. There were three or four other "bad-mashes" in the adjoining cells, but he was never heard to talk to them. He had in fact become deaf and could not listen to what other badmashes talked amongst themselves. Life had come to mean for him an endless spell of painful silence all around. He demanded the removal of his handcuffs and a labour easier than the grinding of eighteen seers. He had disobeyed a jail law but the jail officers had gone far beyond the spirit of any civilised law in their vain attempts to break his will. Legally they could not keep any prisoner in solitary confinement for more than a week nor handcuff both hands for more than a day. He came to know of this law without knowing how to enforce its application in his case. Finding no other means helpful, he resorted to hunger-strike, the last weapon in the armoury of the prisoner.

The doctor was afraid lest he might die of sheer weakness and informed the Superintendent of this view. The latter examined Ram Lal on the day of his weekly round, and told him without a touch of pity, that the Government did not care whether he lived or died and had sent him instructions not to accept the demands. The words of the Superintendent were repeated aloud by a warder, but Ram Lal showed neither surprise nor resentment. His condition became critical on the thirteenth day of

hunger-strike, when the doctor became doubtful of saving his life through forcible feeding. The jail authorities decided at last to yield. The iron that had gripped his hands for more than two years was to be removed; but the warder's efforts to open the rusty thing with the key were in vain. A blacksmith was then called to force open the handcuffs. His hands were free to take a cup of milk between them and break the fast. He had won in the struggle and hoped for better treatment from the jail authorities in future.

His success in the struggle against the authorities was an illusion as is generally the case with prisoners. The simple device of transferring him to another jail despoiled him of the fruits of a hard struggle carried on for years. What an easy thing it was for the jail authorities to give him the illusion of a victory and thus end his misery! He was happy for a couple of days and then came the orders for his transfer to Montgomery jail, the place for habitual offenders. The instructions that went along with him ensured stern treatment by the authorities there. Another hard struggle was in store for him. We heard later on that he had died.

The doctor who had always described him as "too stubborn to listen to reason" seemed very much disillusioned as he said, "They have got rid of him too soon. I had rather hoped they would now succeed in getting labour out of him."

Ram Lal was in fact not in a "stubborn" mood after the conclusion of his hunger-strike. He had reason enough to avail himself of the opportunity to enter normal prison life, but the authorities did not give him the chance. He talked of doing labour and getting out of the punishment cells. "There is nothing wrong with my ears, it is simply *Khushki* (lack of nourishment)," he had said to the doctor. The authorities on the other hand did not forgive him for his disobedience, and death was the last punishment he was fated to receive for the breaking of a jail regulation.

A short-termers could do the most difficult labour for the limited days of his captivity, but a lifer's psychology was fundamentally different. Ram Lal fought for less exacting labour than grinding, because of his will to survive, but the officers concerned had the powers to upset the plans of his life. They defeated him at every step, until he was no more in the field.

CHAPTER 4

SUBSTITUTES FOR REAL THINGS

THE Assistant Superintendent in charge of the jail factory stood for standard work and utilisation of full working capacity of the prisoners. He was an old acquaintance professedly sympathetic to us. "It is mere chance that I am a jail officer and not a prisoner along with you," he had declared to us several times while mentioning his one-time revolutionary ideas in a confidential manner. We knew him as a capricious sort of person, hard to judge and difficult to please. He came daily to inspect our labour but had neither criticised it nor expressed his satisfaction with it even once.

He enquired from us one day, "How do you do here?"

"Quite nicely, but for a bit of monotony," was our reply.

"Try to feel settled here. You are not being sent to the Andamans."

We looked in surprise at his face while he added, "I can't disclose the whole thing to you, it being confidential, but it is in the air in Government circles."

We knew there was no use putting questions to him for he was not the man to tell us the most insignificant thing on asking, though he might give some important information of his own accord. He himself told us a few days afterwards, that a new ward for terrorists was under construction in the jail where we would be sooner or later sent. The news was confirmed by other sources too. We eagerly awaited the chance to join other comrades who were to be brought from various jails and lodged under special arrangements in the Terrorist Ward.

One day I was called to the jail gate for an interview with my relatives. I saw them through the iron netting, sitting outside the gate. They were not called in as our officer-in-charge was not present in the office. He had sent for me and himself gone to his residential quarters from where he had proceeded to the city on some personal business. My relatives sat for hours waiting for his return. I requested the Deputy Superintendent to allow them to have the interview in his presence but he refused to help me in the matter, saying that no one but our officer-in-charge could conduct the interview. My relatives waited for

an hour or more and then went back without seeing me.

The Deputy Superintendent could have authorised any of his subordinates to conduct the interview but he had refused to listen to my repeated protests. I brought the complaint to the notice of the Superintendent, who promised to see to it that our relatives were not put to such inconvenience in future, but he took no steps to ensure the carrying out of his promise. Our friends were never allowed to see us, while even near relatives were turned away on flimsy 'excuses.' They came to realise the difficulties they had to face and naturally came seldom. With the passage of time our letters, interviews, in short all contact with the world at large dwindled almost to nothing. An interview, as long as it was a regular thing, even if it was held once in every three months had a substance of reality about it which was altogether lost when it came to depend on the mere whim of an officer-in-charge or a sentry or a gate-keeper, all of whom possessed the authority to keep us in the dark. We could in fact hardly know when an interview was refused or a letter withheld.

A year went by. We still loved to live an outdoor life all day. There was no arrangement for light in the cells wherein we were locked at night but this was not the main cause of our dislike for them. The place still seemed to retain some impression of the day when we bade farewell to the rest of our comrades. Time had revived our enthusiasm in studies and physical welfare but it had not satisfied the desire for expansion, for a better use of our energies. Of course it had increased it. How to widen our scope? How to get our feet out of this close environment? We thought over these questions and tried to solve them. What was being forced upon us was the worst form of individualism in place of a useful, healthy social living. The prisoner is meant to speak only for himself, to solve his difficulties alone, and to exclude himself from all social activity which might prove his interest in other prisoners living under similar helpless conditions. A police officer investigating a crime says to the suspect, "Inform me against your fellow-criminals and save yourself!" His prototype, the jail officer, harps upon a similar selfish motive of man when he advises, "Do not fraternise with fellow-prisoners. Remain aloof and you shall be released earlier." The laws of remission, rewards, promotions to lambar-darship, are based on the narrowest and the most selfish form of individualism. A prisoner spies against another prisoner, helps the officers at the cost of others, and thus plays an important

part in the prison administration. Our complete segregation from the rest of the prisoners was thus not an isolated instance but an essential measure in the scheme of things. We tried to break through the barrier that existed between us and the rest of the jail population, and met with some success.

We had by now mastered the art of tag-making and found it an easy task and a neat one too. It was finished in less than an hour and a half, thus affording us more leisure to be employed in useful pursuits such as reading, walking, etc. Walking had indeed gone beyond the limits of control and regularity. We left our work and began to foot the path before our cells; we rose from our studies and did the same. It was necessary in the morning, after the midday and evening meals, and filled the interval between the evening and lock-up time. We discussed some subject and walking followed automatically. We heard of some news, some occurrence in the jail, and were immediately on our feet. The habit increased as our interests increased.

We were always on the lookout for some news of the outside world. One of the assistant superintendents, an old acquaintance, coming on his nightly round would oblige us now and then. We would lie awake at night in expectation of his visit and he would at times regale us with nothing but jail gossip. The latter could be described as a sort of news service relating to the happenings in various jails, transfers of officers, conduct of prisoners, etc., and at times provided interesting material for more gossip amongst the prisoners, but in its wider aspect it was an agency for the dissemination of strange, ridiculously exaggerated and fantastic news-items amongst the illiterate masses inside the prison. We had, for example, told a prisoner or two of our transfer to the Andamans in the near future, and the news had come back to us in various enlarged versions of the proposed trip to that far-off place. The prisoners would usually circulate the self-deceptive news of the transfer of a superintendent or a deputy superintendent if he was a severe type of officer. It was a common belief amongst the prisoners that transfer does take place sooner or later when rumours are set afoot. Occasional amusement would be provided by a reported encounter between an officer and some member of his family, the jail warders usually playing the role of newsmen from the residential quarters of the jail employees to the jail. "The Deputy's son gave a resounding slap on the cheek of his father," said one of the warders one day.

"Why, what had happened?" inquired the lambardar of the Badmash Line, all agog with interest.

The warder came out with the following story. "The Deputy's daughter-in-law had begun to sing to the accompaniment of instrumental music when he went home. He stood aside for a while, amazed, and then began to dance and wave his hat in the air and shouted, 'No need for the professional singers of Hira Mandi now. Our girls have learnt the art!' The father's hysterical outburst was silenced by a sudden slap struck with the youthful vigour possessed by his son who seemed to have appeared from nowhere. Ha, ha, ha. . . !"

The warder found in this an opportune occasion for indulging in a general character-sketch of the Deputy. The warders too have their grievances like the prisoners. They are a persecuted lot with small salaries and long day-and-night duties. They usually complain about not getting time enough for sleep. They too are searched like prisoners at the time of their coming in and going out of the jail. Theirs is the class that befriends, sympathises, threatens, chastises the prisoners, persecutes them at the bidding of the officers, and also carries on the smuggling business for the sake of a few additional silver coins. Midway between the worlds of freedom and slavery, free or confined, they seem to carry on an unenviable existence similar to that of the ill-fed, ill-clothed, illiterate millions of our country.

The Deputy Superintendent has the main responsibility for the safe custody of and discipline amongst the prisoners. He wields the power and carries out the policy. The warders and the prisoners are under his direct rule. He is often back-bitten. The present Deputy Superintendent was no exception. The prisoners in the Badmash Line shouted abuse against him in the night. There was a general restlessness amongst the convict population owing to the alleged severity of his treatment.

Coming on his nightly round he himself heard one day what was said against him. Stopping before my cell he asked, "Can the abuse of the foul-mouthed rascals affect me in the least?"

I waited for a moment or two in silence and when he said nothing more I replied, "Abuse is the most objectionable method of voicing one's discontent, but you should not on that account be unsympathetic to the genuine complaints of a prisoner confined in a punishment cell."

"I do not mind such foul language at all and am never influenced by it," he declared once again.

"You can in such a dispassionate mood better investigate the causes of the discontent," I suggested.

"The jail is not a place of contentment. Everyone here has

some genuine grievance," he remarked with a sly look and a wry smile. He was in the best of moods that day. Continuing in a friendly manner he exclaimed, "I would not be getting four and twenty rupees per month if I sincerely tried to make every prisoner happy at the cost of the law." So saying he patted me on the shoulder and went away.

This Deputy Superintendent, famous for his oily tongue, was no common person. He could be familiar apparently to the complete disregard of his high office. Any subordinate whom he praised regarded himself as marked for some severe punishment in the near future. "Uncle!" he would address some old warder, and the latter would grow panicky about what was going to befall him. "Friend, O my old friend," he would say to a prisoner, and the man would become suspicious that some evil was in store for him. The Deputy Superintendent never forgave anyone for a breach of the rules or an act of indiscipline. He was as lavish in punishments as in friendly words. I wondered what more restrictions he was thinking of imposing upon the Badmash Line prisoners when he said that their abuse could have no effect upon him.

Money, as his last words suggested to me, was the core of our being. We gave it the worth of our blood, built our flesh around it and forgot all human sentiments in the joy of building more and more. We could never rise to the full heights of humanity unless we took power in our own hands and embraced the principles of socialism. The capitalist system could only enhance our abject slavery to money.

The officers changed, but not the conditions under which the prisoners lived. That is how the personality of anyone belonging to the former class counted very much with the latter. The system remained in the background whilst individuals came to the fore and inspired feelings of resentment, hatred, revenge or revolt. The Deputy Superintendent did nothing to remove the increasing ill-feeling against him. The prisoners were asking themselves, "What should we do?" News of a disquieting sort did reach us in spite of the strict censorship imposed on the "jail gossip" of our ward. The prisoners were thinking of some drastic step. The Superintendent and the Deputy Superintendent had taken big steps towards the enforcement of some severe regulations and imposed new restrictions on the liberty of the prisoners.

The Assistant Superintendent in charge of the jail factory, taking his cue from his superiors, began a vigorous campaign for the improvement of prison-labour. He demanded sample *moshaq*-

gat from all. The best specimen of workmanship of each kind was shown to the prisoners and they were asked to produce articles of standard size and standard shape. Severe punishments were meted out to scores of them when their work did not satisfy the expectations of the Assistant Superintendent.

There are men with feeble minds ; the majority of the illiterate prisoners cannot even manipulate simple mechanisms. No one is interested in the labour forced upon him. Add to the simpletons and the rogues, the nervous type of men who can never work well under the threat of punishment and you get an idea of labour in captivity! The Assistant Superintendent became extremely unpopular with all the labouring prisoners because he was not in a position to provide any other incentive for work except punishment and rough treatment.

Driven to desperation, some Sikh prisoners one day pounced upon him as he was busy inspecting their *moshaqqat*, and began to belabour him with sticks they had got hold of. An alarm was at once raised, and a large force of warders and convict lambardars armed with lathis rushed to the scene. The Sikh prisoners were mercilessly beaten, and locked up afterwards in solitary cells. They were flogged next day in the open place before the central tower (*Ghanta-ghar*) of the jail.

The labouring prisoners under the charge of the Assistant Superintendent were in an extreme state of unrest. We conveyed our sympathies with their demands through a trustworthy lambardar and advised them to strike work rather than employ violence against the officer-in-charge of the factory. A week had hardly passed when another batch of prisoners assaulted the same officer. Each one of them was beaten and locked up in a punishment cell, and next day awarded thirty stripes with the cane. The prisoners with their facilities withdrawn, and liberties curbed, were in a state of revolt. The jail authorities on the other hand openly showed their hostility and let loose all the forces of oppression and repression upon them.

Within a few days another batch of prisoners challenged the same officer when he was going on his inspection round, and slapped him. They could not beat him much because of the heavy guard which always remained with him for his protection. This batch too underwent the same treatment as had been meted out to the former ones. The Superintendent, however, did not order flogging this time as he had begun to suspect a big conspiracy behind these planned acts of violence and wanted to investigate into the whole matter himself.

At about half past eleven in the night I was just preparing to sleep when a lambardar from the other side of the ward came running towards the Badmash Line to inform the warder on duty there that the Superintendent was coming. A minute later he stood before my cell. He showed surprise at my being awake so late, threw the light of his torch into the cell and seemed to have noted the fact that there was an illegally kept *tipai* upon which my earthen pitcher was placed, but his scrutinising gaze was only a matter of habit; he had really come for another purpose.

"Why is an unending trouble going on in the jail?" he asked after looking carefully into my cell for a while. "I want you to tell me the real facts which have anything to do with the recent happenings," he added.

I told him the difference between the man who had started us well on the task of tag-making and his successor who had done nothing but poke into the spokes of the running wheel of normal prison-labour. I gave him the specific instance of Ram Lal whom his subordinate officers had treated in a most unreasonable manner. I charged them with consistently and systematically poisoning his mind and keeping him grossly misinformed about the prisoner's conditions and behaviour.

He winced at the words "poisoning" and "unreasonable" but did not say anything. I explained to him that enhancement of their labour must be accompanied by some real effort at the improvement of the prisoners' food, clothing and living conditions. Long-term prisoners, especially lifers, I argued with him, must be made to know and feel that they could spend the days of their imprisonment under tolerable conditions. A prisoner must have faith in his going out alive one day and it was the duty of the prison officials not to kill that faith by refusing to treat him like a human being, I suggested.

The Superintendent was evidently displeased with my last words implying inhuman treatment by his subordinates, as he observed, "It is just rhetoric and not a statement of facts in simple words. I want to know what exactly the fault of my subordinate is."

"The officers," I replied more clearly, "carrying out the law in a sympathetic spirit, leave a chance to the prisoners to create some facilities for themselves. The exceptional tightening of discipline witnessed in the recent past has deprived the prisoners of this chance. Even the making of complaints and requests permitted by law has been rendered difficult and that is why there is so much unrest."

"It is the result of their resorting to violence against my subordinates," he declared.

His words left no doubt in my mind about his contempt for the prisoners responsible for assaults on the Assistant Superintendent. "How could they be allowed to do bad labour or not do it at all?" he inquired. "Give me any particular instance of cruelty or overstepping of lawful bounds by the officers and I shall look into it."

He listened to me for more than an hour and seemed to be somewhat impressed. There could be no doubt about his sincere wish to establish peace once more in his "kingdom." I even got the impression that he knew the truth and needed no proofs of the specific allegations I had made. "I will see what I can do," he said and went away.

The prisoners, except a small minority of them, and all the convict officers, struck work next day and also did not eat their meals. The Superintendent, strict disciplinarian as he was, made no personal contact with the prisoners in order to pacify them until he felt quite helpless in maintaining discipline by force. He made a direct approach to them on the third day of the strike, going all alone straight into the midst of an irate crowd who were shouting slogans against jail officials.

His sudden appearance made them stop their cries in amazement. "What are your grievances?" asked he in a tone expressive of leniency, and waited for their answer. The prisoners had never before thought of putting forth their case in a disciplined way through representatives chosen by them. They mostly appeared to be an unorganised mob that instinctively bends before power which can usually exert a dominating influence over mass psychology. No one came forward to explain the common viewpoint of the prisoners. They should have at least told the Superintendent to go and enquire first from those who were taken to punishment cells after a thorough thrashing. They stood meek and submissive, with only a few voices speaking of minor grievances of a personal nature.

"Give up violence; submit to jail discipline. That is the best course for you. I shall see to it that all your genuine complaints are removed if you act up to this advice," repeated the Superintendent several times. The prisoners were placated by the lenient and obliging attitude of the Superintendent and had their meals and resumed work.

A great struggle, a heroic effort for a joint solution of their difficulties petered out. They had been informed of our hope that

the Superintendent would come to talk to them but had had no regular consultations amongst themselves as to the nature of the stand they should take before him. All that had happened was in fact a sudden outburst of the general feeling of resentment pent up in the minds of the prisoners. Some extremists amongst them initiated the attack and others followed in imitation of the bold example set before them. The brutal corporal punishment suffered by some led others on to further steps of a more effective nature giving proofs of mass support and sympathy behind the sufferers. The work and hunger-strikes were the most effective weapons and they could never have failed but for the lack of proper guidance. The initiative was not in the hands of the jail authorities who reacted with precision and speed. Their first step was to transfer to other jails the persons who had taken a leading part in the struggle. There was, on the very next day of the conclusion of the strike, none to remind the Superintendent of the promises he had made.

More thorough searches, earlier lock-up of the prisoners, and a severe discipline were the bitter fruits of the hard and courageous struggle they had been carrying on for about a month. Their continuous suffering could bring no relief. The Superintendent had had an easy victory at a time when he was virtually prepared for the admission of defeat.

Two points of grave significance for the prisoners emerged from the struggle. Firstly, the authorities had no need to negotiate peace with the prisoners except as a temporary makeshift so long as they had the powers to get rid of "unwanted, troublesome, unruly" elements. Secondly, the prisoners' struggle should take the form of a joint enterprise for the improvement of their general conditions rather than be allowed to be simplified into revengeful deeds against individual officers responsible for harshness towards them. They could only gain by fighting the prevailing prison system that kept them under miserable conditions. Fought with this clear-cut aim, the struggle was sure to bear permanent results, making it more and more difficult for the authorities to make any united stand against them and to parry successfully the blows of the developing revolution.

There was an evident connection between the initial outbursts of violence and the subsequent concerted step of the prisoners. I pondered more and more over the cause of their failure. They had struggled valiantly, and given us much to brood over. What was the prison but India in miniature showing all the problems in a clearer perspective? They were the masses beginning to

feel the urge for freedom. Tattered clothes, insufficiency of diet, unhealthy conditions, poverty, wretchedness, that was what they stood against. The presence of a boiled rat and vermin in their diet was not simply a complaint which they had backed with continuous protests; it was a disease to be fought by protective measures. Illegal beatings, deprivation of the commonest liberties, and imposition of additional irksome labour were the signs of a decrepit system, relying solely on the use of force, which could hardly be impressed by the uncontrolled emotions of its opponents. I widened my outlook, and the country, the object of my love and veneration, rose in her resplendent vastness before my vision. I soared in the air from "here" to "there" and came back richer in the wealth of mind and heart. What was wrong with India was reflected in her likeness, the diminutive form of her, with exceptional vividness. She was, in her smaller aspect, a shade exuding light, like blinking eyes laden with tears. I could visualise the scintillating pain of the shady being who was full of vague, oppressive, criminal or even treacherous ideas, not without a corresponding desire for an all-round improvement.

CHAPTER 5

IN THE TERRORIST WARD

WE were interested very much in the news about our future "home," the new ward for terrorists, as it passed through various stages of construction. The warders going round on their watch in the inner circle would tell us as they passed by our cells, that it was being built up with speed. One day we learnt that it was ready. A few days later prisoners were for the first time confined in it at night. We hoped to be there soon. Our eagerness, our curiosity and impatience increased as no orders came for us to shift there. Several terrorist comrades, all "C" class prisoners, had come one by one from different jails to occupy the place. The authorities would give us no reason for still keeping us separate from them and only asked us to wait. . . .

It was a small jail within the bigger, surrounded by a fifteen-foot high wall, totally shutting out the view of the rest of the jail. Special watch and ward arrangements in force there pre-

cluded all contact with any non-terrorist prisoner. Our "home" had several more of such disadvantages but it continued to attract us. . . .

One evening as we were sitting under the shade of the *peepal* tree before our cells, a chit came from *Ghanta-ghar* containing the information that Jahangiri Lal had been placed in the "C" class and was required to shift to the Terrorist Ward. So we knew the reason of our not being allowed until now to join our comrades. The Government had a plan of taking away our "B" class facilities one by one in order to remove the chances of a united protest. The "B" class status recognised by them for the past five years was not a gift from the Government but a concession wrested from unwilling hands. We knew how the mind of the bureaucracy worked, and had never had any doubts regarding the dignity of political prisoners which was dependent *not on the bureaucratic lords sitting in offices but on our own ideals and sufferings.*

Jahangiri Lal went first. Malik Kundan Lal and Pandit Rupchand followed a month later. I was left alone in the place for no fault of mine; the orders for keeping me in "C" class had not yet arrived. My protests against this enforced solitary confinement made the Superintendent agree to my transfer to the Terrorist Ward.

The time came to bid farewell to the place which had seen many a vicissitude in our life, the duty of doing so falling upon me, the last of all to leave. I paid a tribute to the cherished memories of my comrades whom Ward No. 14 Old had received together, and then let go one by one like birds from a cage. The place was a sinister one, in the sense that it could never unite the birds again, but their cheerful cries and exalted songs had created a lasting illusion of happiness, not all of which could ever be lost for me. There was the usual feeling of cold comfort experienced at the moments of severing of connections and breaking of links. The joy of forming new friendships and entering a new society accosted me as I stepped out of the place. It was midday of the 17th of September 1935, when I entered the Terrorist Ward.

I saw Pandit Rupchand, Malik Kundan Lal and Jahangiri Lal. I met Pandit Inderpal, our old companion, who had met me for the last time in the Guru Dutt Bhawan Library more than five years back. He was not the same lively and energetic Inderpal, but a veritable jail edition of his former self looking strikingly thinner in his "C" class dress. None of us had

suffered so much as he. He had meanwhile seen through our and his own trial and lived in the condemned cells, as he too had been awarded the sentence of death, which was later on commuted by the High Court to one of transportation for life. The most difficult period in his life was that which he had lived all alone without the chance of seeing any human being's face except that of a warder on duty in a solitary place in the Borstal Jail where he was confined during the period of our trial. We embraced and then stood looking at each other smiling feebly. We had so much to say to each other and yet words failed us. There was neither any ambition in the present nor a programme for the near future. What could we talk about with much eagerness? There was time enough for chewing the cud of the past. It did not require to be told that he had to bear the brunt of the police persecution, as he had mortally offended them by not only retracting from his former statement, but by charging them with various criminal designs against the accused in our case. He was remade by suffering and reshaped by tragedy which had been his fate. His marriage, his arrest, his efforts to save us and not even succeeding in saving himself, followed by the long brooding silence of the past five years, flashed through my mind in succession, as I stood with his hands in mine.

There were several other terrorist prisoners whom I met for the first time. S. Bachint Singh and Udharn Singh were Babar Akalis from Doaba undergoing life imprisonment. There was Tika Ram "Sukhan," a socialist poet with three years' rigorous imprisonment for illegal possession of a pistol. S. Tara Singh and Comrade Yog Raj were two young men convicted in the Gurdaspur Conspiracy Case. The last but not the least was the venerable figure of Mahatma Parmanand of Jhansi, a 1914—Conspiracy Case prisoner who had been in jail for the past twenty-one years, and was still unable to foresee the end of his captivity.

All these comrades were in the working-shed situated in the farthest corner of the yard. They had been busy making tags, and had only stopped their work when the door of the shed opened to let me in. We were let out into the open when the work was finished.

In the south-east corner of the ward, just outside the working-shed was a small patch of green field. I looked at it with a feeling of joyful surprise. "Illegal" radishes were grown there with "illegal" seeds and similar implements and labour. The jail authorities did not permit such things but the terrorists were not bound by the official interpretation of the law, and their un-

checked "lawlessness" in this matter had laid the foundation of our future garden. About half a dozen mulberry trees were planted in a row in front of the cells in addition to a couple of *peepal* trees of spontaneous growth. An acre of land was walled in leaving enough open space in front of the twenty cells, where the comrades walked when they were not busy. We continued talking till the head warden-in-charge brought the evening meals.

The comrades sat in batches of two or three outside their cells and took their food in the iron cups provided. I went to my cell as my food had not yet arrived. I felt for the first time an overwhelming disgust for my better class. The distinction was to end soon but I could not say whether it was to take a day, a week or a month. I thought of giving up the class voluntarily, and talked of this to my fellow-convicts who advised me to wait and not forestall the orders of the Government. All were thinking in terms of a future struggle, and it was not considered advisable to give up voluntarily those privileges for which we had to fight.

I could remain unlocked all the day and sleep outside at night, but I did not avail myself of these or of the other "B" class facilities, yet I was still unhappy at the distinction. The authorities could not maintain an insulting and overbearing attitude towards a "B" class prisoner but they were accustomed to riding roughshod over the sentiments of "C" class prisoners. A uniform status for all the political prisoners was the only solution of our difficulties so far as the arrogant and insulting behaviour of the jail authorities was concerned, but we could accomplish little without public support. We had to create a better atmosphere and wait for a suitable opportunity for launching a campaign for raising the standard of all political prisoners. There was absolutely no chance of our effecting any link with the public outside.

The ordinary convicts were not so strictly watched and suspiciously treated, but many of their advantages over us were nullified by the lack of a unifying purpose amongst them. Unlike the non-politicals, there were no tell-tale lambardars created out of us, and the mechanism of rewards and punishments had scarcely any chance to operate where complete equality prevailed. Closely knit together, we were able to struggle harder and suffer more. The authorities, who did not put us together for the pleasure of seeing us united, took our challenge to their autocratic powers much more seriously than they did in the case of ordinary prisoners. Perpetual strife was the result of such an oversuspicious

attitude on their part. We fought because we had to create conditions for life out of the "watertight compartment" that our ward was. The older prisoners such as the Babar Akalis and Mahatma Parmanand had had the experience of living amidst non-political prisoners whom they had organised and led on numerous occasions in the past against official repression. We were to become an organised and well-disciplined body under their leadership.

About six or seven of us were sitting in my cell the day after my coming here when my food was brought in. All of them rose in awkward haste and left the cell one by one with the exception of Mahatma Parmanand. "Take your food," he gently said after a brief spell of silence caused by the most painful embarrassment I had ever felt in the society of my comrades. Why should they leave me to eat alone when all of them did so in groups of twos and threes? The answer to the question ought to have been supplied at least by my old comrades who had but yesterday emphatically told me there could be no distinction between me and the others because of my temporary "B" class facilities.

I was deeply gratified when the Mahatma accepted the offer to sit beside me and share the meal. His lively talk bespoke a cheerful outlook on life. His all-embracing humanity was contagious. Twenty-one years of continuous jail life did not seem to have broken a single chord of goodness in his heart. There was none who was not impressed by his refined nature. The jail authorities too treated him with respect. "How did you get on all this time?" I asked by way of turning our talk towards his past life.

"I am perfectly healthy and have never fallen ill in jail," he replied, and added laughingly, "I am jail-proof."

His fairly good health and socially useful ideas were the only reasons for his still being here. He was not released as the C.I.D. scented politics in him and feared he might work because he still had the energy to do so. The Government might have released him ten years before if he had been an ordinary criminal with a heinous crime to his credit!

His life was a lesson to all whose life-terms had hardly begun.

"You have set a bad example before us," I laughed.

"No, no, you who belong to an impatient generation shall find freedom much sooner," he retorted.

"Did you not think so about yourself when you were newly imprisoned?" I asked.

"What if I thought so? Does it disprove the difference between you and me?" he queried smilingly, and added without a pause, "The way you spurn bad food, refuse to live in an unhealthy place and worry over unsuitable conditions forebodes a speedy solution of your difficulties. Times are fast changing, I say. . . ."

"And what was your method of solving your difficulties?" I questioned.

"To eat the worst food, remain half hungry, sleep in the damp and live in the dark cells and yet think healthy thoughts. I have always been optimistic and have never worried," he explained in the deliberate way characteristic of him.

I was interested in thought control but not in the philosophy of renunciation his words seemed to imply. Further talks revealed that my impression was erroneous, for he was not a man of renunciation but of sound practical ideas.

He had seen scores of jails. He was in the Yeravda Jail in the days of the Congress Satyagraha movement of 1930-32, working as an instructor in the weaving factory of the jail, he wielded great influence over the prison population and had won the respect of the Congress prisoners confined there. He was happy to meet enthusiastic youths full of hopes for our country, and inspired them with his cool-headedness and the sympathetic qualities of his heart. One day some young men told him that the 26th January, the Independence Day, was drawing near and the Congress prisoners were to reiterate their independence pledge and hoist the national flag on the occasion. They proposed that being the person best suited in their view he should perform the last-mentioned ceremony. The Mahatma was not the man to lag behind nor take any half-measures. He duly hoisted the tricolour upon the central building of the jail! The authorities, hitherto well pleased with his work in the factory, were infuriated and put him in a punitive cell. To their dismay they found that all the labouring prisoners in the jail struck work in sympathy with him. The officers realised what a mistake they had made in keeping him in association barracks along with ordinary convicts.

On the 24th of October the Superintendent, to my heartfelt relief, informed me that my "B" class had been cancelled. We were unlocked immediately after his parade was over, and came out into the open. I smiled at them and they smiled at me. The ever lively S. Tara Singh embraced me and cried, "I am happy. It did not look well. Come now, would you prefer a pyjama or a *kachha*? You know, a 'C' class prisoner can't have both.

"I shall be glad to see you wear the same dress as ours." I remembered the day when I had donned the clothes of those condemned to death. It was the livery of the living symbolising a life of equality, brotherhood and unceasing struggle of political prisoners that I put on today. The struggle, in fact, carried on since the day of our entry into the jail, had now changed its character by becoming more acute. We had lost all our earlier gains and were to begin anew.

The Mahatma made a characteristic remark about the Government when he said, "They can only recognise one standard for all of us, the lowest, unless we make them realise the truth that consciously equal people can be satisfied with nothing but an equality of a progressively rising standard."

His experiences about how the Government had been always forcing struggles upon political prisoners led me to question him more about those in which he himself had participated. While in the Andamans, he had been awarded thirty stripes with the cane for assaulting the chief warder of the cellular jail. The officer was a corrupt one always persecuting prisoners with the object of extorting money from them. He was especially brutal and insulting to political prisoners.

"He abused me and I beat him in return," said the Mahatma inadvertently laying stress on the lesser evil, the use of force.

Nearly all his comrades were out by now. Why he was still here was to an extent explained by the following event which happened in 1933, about two years before.

A C.I.D. Inspector came to the jail to ascertain his views and submit a report to the higher authorities who were to decide about his release.

"What do you propose to do if you were to be set free now?" he asked.

"I will work for the masses," was the Mahatma's unhesitating reply.

ductive of practical results. Here were some comrades deficient in English, Urdu or Hindi, whom he helped. He would himself teach one for a fortnight or a month and then declare, "You are progressing satisfactorily and can do without me." He then chose another pupil and laboured for his educational improvement for a limited period. The urge for education was to him like the urge for freedom which once born must go on expanding. A man of simple habits and steadfast character like him expected the wheel of education to run smoothly after the initial start. The Mahatma wanted every illiterate or half-educated person to depend upon self-education, just as a prisoner without resources did in the matter of many an essential requirement of a decent life.

Pandit Inderpal, another enthusiastic advocate of self-education, had taught himself Persian during the long solitary life he had lived in a cell of the Borstal Jail. He kept company with Maulana Rum, Firdausi and Hafiz, because there was none else to associate with him. No wonder that he was always ready to repay the debt of the illustrious masters by inviting all to drink at the fountain of their knowledge. The *Diwan-i-Hafiz*, the *Masnavi* or *Shahnama* exerted a bewitching influence, the epic of humanity's progress under the banner of the hammer and sickle threw its tentacles; history and science applied their skilful persuasive power and we were caught by the threads of our hearts. Progressive influences had caught us in their grip.

CHAPTER 6

"SMALL, SHARP, SEARCHING EYES!"

ALTHOUGH not one of us gave it more than two hours every day all of us were making tags. It was an encumbering liability. The myopic "Sukhan" was now and then seen by the early-rising comrades to be making tags in the working-shed under the light of the electric lamp. He simply wanted to do away with the nasty business before the day began. It was more or less the same with everybody else. The food was distributed early in the morning, but we felt no inclination to eat while the *moshaqqat* still lay on our hands. The jail authorities wanted

us to submit to their discipline and do eight hours' daily work. Our studies and gardening work were carried on much against their wishes. A pencil or pen and ink and paper were the most objectionable things to be possessed by a prisoner and we had to carry them upon our persons like weapons, the possession of which was a cognisable offence within the purview of the Arms Act.

Our head warden-in-charge, a "Shah Ji" was a notorious law-maintainer reported to be No. 1 in all the jails of the province. He searched our cells any time in the day, and as many times as he chose. Any prohibited article found in our cells was sufficient to bring about punishments upon us. Shah Ji's activities meant a serious interference in our studies and forced us to remain always on our guard. We resorted to various devices of hoodwinking him, such as hiding our things in the ground or other suitable places inside or outside the cells from where we could take them out when the "all clear" was sounded. Shah Ji's main duty was to guard our communication with anyone inside the jail who might be used as a link with the outside world. We did our labour and tried to avoid punishment in order to put more force behind our demands for the improvement of our condition. The authorities imposed all possible restrictions on our communications with the object of circumscribing the scope to effect any desirable change. We had developed the technique of helping one another at critical moments and went to the assistance of anyone whose cell was not "clean" at the time of a "surprise raid."

Shah Ji was a lean, lanky person, half Pathan, half Punjabi, with small, sharp searching eyes. The Superintendent and the Deputy Superintendent regarded him as a paragon of virtue, a most trustworthy and loyal servant of the Government. He seemed to have little interest outside the jail because he remained inside even when he was expected to have gone out long before. He was too ill-tempered and unsocial to find pleasure in the society of the jail employees amongst whom he lived. He had during his long association with prisoners acquired the qualities of a bird of prey. His sudden swoops on unsuspecting prisoners loitering about in the vicinity of our ward had spread terror throughout the jail. He availed himself of the fact that a prisoner is by force of circumstances a breaker of jail laws. Search the person of one, and you can be almost sure that you will find in his possession something else besides his clothes and food, because these are the only things allowed him by the law. A pinch of

salt or chewing-gum, a needle, a piece of thread, a pin, a rag, or any such thing can be carried about only at the risk of *peski* (punishment). We looked through the peep-hole of the iron gate of our ward and found punishment ever standing guard on our habitation. To the right were a hundred punitive cells, to the left the washing-machine and shed, and in front the enclosure for habituals and the tents. We could peep through the hole and see the prisoners in front of our ward moving about, sweeping and doing other sundry work, and that was all of the world we saw.

The fact that we kept unauthorised things was especially distasteful to Shah Ji because of the impracticability of carrying out the search of our persons without the assistance of an adequate and well-organised guard of warders or convict *lambardars*. He had therefore to satisfy himself with searching our cells while we were locked inside the working-shed, and doing so at his leisure in the latter place when we were locked inside our cells. Our watchfulness under these circumstances could never be so complete as not to give him the occasional pleasure of finding some "contraband" article such as an inkpot or a pencil. At times his depredations really took the character of a veritable drive for dispossessing us in that world where things were rare and exceedingly difficult to get. He, the man on the spot, was more important than any higher officer who could only come once or twice a week and study the situation and give necessary orders, which their loyal servant was only too keen to carry out. Things vanished from our ward, even unobjectionable articles were thrown away beyond the walls, and Shah Ji was "surprised in the extreme" when told of such happenings.

We were ordered to our cells and locked in whenever the news went round that the Deputy Superintendent was coming. Everyone was meant to speak for himself standing behind the bars like the helpless prisoner that he was. The Deputy especially took objection to any joint complaints, united demands or protests made before him. The official mind, his stiff-necked attitude taught us, depended for discipline in the jail on nothing but cutting us off from our life-line and leaving no loopholes in the walls of separation they had raised. In one respect they were right. How could we have any illegal thing unless some jail employee brought it for us? The authorities naturally paid more attention to the tightening of restrictions than to the snatching of things from us in a provocative way.

On the third *moshaqqat* (for the prisoners there are six *moshaqqat*-

gals in place of days of the week and one day, the Sunday) the Superintendent held his weekly parade of our ward. The parade in theory provided the prisoners with an opportunity of acquainting the Superintendent with their difficulties and complaints, but in actual practice it was merely a prearranged show, intended to impress upon the prisoners the might of the highest authority in the prison. He would come with an orderly holding a canopy over his head and another waving a *Chamwar* by his side and a long train of subordinate officers and *lambardars* following him at a respectful distance. Whenever he spoke, he spoke to the tune of "I am the law!" He did not exaggerate, because in fact his word was law. We never felt inclined to speak to him unless there was a grievance or a complaint about food or clothing.

"Give him something to think about or he would think of some criticism" was another consideration regarding him that experience had taught us to bear in mind. "Why don't they change their cells every day?" he would for instance inquire with knitted brows from the Assistant Superintendent in charge of our ward. His questions usually were connected with the searches of our cells and our persons and the quality and quantity of our labour. He would look at each prisoner from head to foot, throw a searching glance into his cell though it might be wholly empty, all the kit being on show in the verandah outside, and move forward with a jerk of the cane in his hand. The prisoner felt humiliated and injured in his self-respect even when no criticism was levelled against him. He usually felt a relief when the parade was over. Our cells were then unlocked and we would be allowed to have our food, which was also inspected every week by the Superintendent. That day the food was always slightly better than usual. The subordinates deceived the Superintendent regarding the real quality of the food supplied to the prisoners and he upheld this system of deception which showed an utter disregard of the actual living conditions in the jail. He made a show of listening to and redressing grievances. The removal of every complaint or difficulty was but a makeshift and the solution of every problem temporary. No improvement lasted long. The bread could not be made of clean wheat and of prescribed weight. It was well-baked only for that part of the prison which the Superintendent was to visit. The vegetables could never but be overripe and unwholesome, because the best part of the garden produce went in *dalis* to officers and their friends and relatives. The finding of a rag, eggs of lizards, leavings of rats, or some other dirty thing, was not unusual. A rat or a lizard was of course rarely found. This

was however not the case with vermin which travelled unchecked all along their path from the garden to the cooking-pot.

We had been gradually extending our garden. The seeds of flowers and vegetables we had procured by smuggling. The Superintendent saw the earth going green and enquired, "Why do you sow vegetables when you can't be allowed to cook them?"

He was told that all vegetables could be eaten raw.

The day came when we had our first crop of brinjals. No one had matches. The glasses of myopic "Sukhan" focussed upon a black rag in the sun produced smoke. A fire was soon lit and the vegetables cut with an improvised tin-knife were cooked in the biggest iron cup we had. It was a day of much merry-making rounded off by a feast. We did not care a rap for the rule that forbade cooking. The psychology of the tillers of the soil guided us to the best appropriation of the produce of our labour.

We had been pressing for soap and oil and reading and writing facilities. Any request made to the Superintendent was taken as an insult when not couched in the humblest terms. The only honourable method of obtaining some facility from the authorities was to go on enjoying it until they realised the futility of persisting in their refusal. We had been reading and writing without their permission. Gardening was another illegal hobby. The oil and soap were now smuggled in small quantities. We did not conceal the articles of toilet from Shah Ji. What a misery it was to be secretive about the commonest necessities of life! The Superintendent again turned down our request for oil and soap.

"You will use the oil for cooking purposes," he objected. He had several other objections too. Jealous of his powers, he had sensed revolt in our increasing demands. To him yielding had always been synonymous with weakness.

Soap could not be used as a fat. The comrade who reminded him of this fact got the prompt reply, "You don't need soap when you have no oil."

The duty of Shah Ji was changed, to our great satisfaction, because of his inability to check irregularities. He was responsible for his own undoing, as he had been making too many reports of indiscipline in our ward. The authorities above him had naturally felt insulted, by-passed, outwitted and intrigued at such alarming reports. We were in fact demanding a sort of autonomy in our little province and not complete independence as they seemed to fear.

CHAPTER 7

SMALL THINGS BECOME GREAT!

THE new head warder searched our cells only once and that too at approximately the same time every day ; but being more cautious about our safe custody he revived the practice of waking us at night. "*Bol Jawan*," he demanded of Pandit Rupchand, and shook him roughly out of his sleep. The Pandit rose only to send him reeling back with a push at his throat, demanding sternly, "Why did you not switch on the light and satisfy yourself that I was alive? Am I a condemned prisoner to be awakened every three hours in the night?"

The new head warder received a similar reply from one or two others. The authorities did not pursue the matter further and so we were not awakened any more in the night. They had nevertheless, more effective means of retaliation, such as withholding of letters and cheating us of interviews and other lawful rights, and did not fail to employ them.

Our "House" held its meetings, elected various committees to deal with different problems which the increasing tension in our relationship with the authorities had created, and unanimously decided to press more vigorously for our rights.

"Where is the *hauz* (reservoir for water) you daily talk of?" inquired a curious warder who had been on duty here for the past week or so.

"The *hauz* is yet to be ; so far we only have a 'House'." He knew the meaning of the word and smiled satisfaction. "I thought you were thinking of an underground *hauz* to hide your things in," said he with becoming frankness.

"You are all in a mood in which small quarrels take the form of a big one, and this is simply undesirable."

The above view opportunely expressed by Mahatma Parmanand was shared by others too. The mood had, in fact, come to stay as a permanent condition of our existence, because there could be no breaking away from the prosaic reality that prison life was after all but a succession of hard struggles for comparatively insignificant results. Here one dissipates one's energies for slippery and unsubstantial gains. An obstacle in the path to progress persisted a few steps further in its function of demand-

ing an ever-renewed effort. The shield of indifference and reaction shifted its position with such a mechanical skill that no human influence worth the name penetrated into it. The prison administration would neither make nor invite big attacks so long as it could sleep undisturbed over the legalised and well-defended misery, wretchedness and helplessness of the captives under its charge. The cropping up of too many minor issues was therefore inherent in the circumstances of our situation.

Pandit Rupchand one day asked for a new earthen pitcher as his old one was broken.

"How did it break?" "How can I know that you did not break it deliberately?" "You people are always careless about Government property!" "Be careful in future!" The head warder after addressing such questions and remarks went away to bring a pitcher. The new one he brought was filled with water and found to be leaky. The Pandit placed it on the floor of his cell and the water began to leak out of it. The head warder, asked to bring another, angrily replied, "Am I your servant to be bothered again and again?"

"You shall have to bring another pitcher before locking me in for the night!" demanded the Pandit.

The head warder who had always seen prisoners too humble to stand erect before him, felt affronted and shouted angrily, "It will do perfectly well: I don't see any defect in it."

The Pandit without arguing further threw the pitcher down on the floor. A piece or two fell at the warder's feet and his legs were wet. "I have been insulted and assaulted," shouted the warder, and went out to report to the Deputy Superintendent.

This minor quarrel had every chance of becoming a grave issue if the authorities decided to punish Pandit Rupchand. "What do you think about the matter?" I asked Mahatmaji. His view was that the authorities wouldn't create any trouble unless we took some hasty steps in advance.

Pandit Rupchand had already informed the head warder that he would not submit to the night lock-up until he was provided with a new pitcher. "The question is," I told Mahatmaji, "whether the officers will use persuasion or force. We shall have to support our comrade in the latter case."

The Mahatma confidently expressed the hope that the warder would bring a new pitcher and he was proved to be right in his view that the jail servants were not spoiling for a fight.

On the third day after this incident a complaint about the conduct of Pandit Rupchand was duly made by the head warder

before the Superintendent when he came on parade.

"Do you allege that Rupchand deliberately broke two pitchers that were all right?" inquired the Superintendent.

"Yes, Sir, and he broke the second by way of assaulting me."

"That would amount to wrongful wastage of Government property, but I must be convinced that the pitchers were not leaky."

"Sir, I can bring some out of the stock we have here and show you that they are all without defect." So saying, he went towards the kitchen room which was used as the godown of our ward and came back within a few minutes followed by two convicts who swept our ward. They brought four pitchers which they placed upon the floor in front of Pandit Rupchand's cell.

The Superintendent looked into them and inquired, "Why did you not fill them to the brim? I see only a small quantity of water at the bottom of each."

One of the two prisoners, a simple, mountainous fellow, being afraid of the Superintendent's attitude, blurted out the truth, "Sir, it is not my fault. The head warder instructed me to do so."

The Superintendent said nothing but his looks unmistakably told the warder, "The mischief was yours."

The evidence of a warder or a head warder is ordinarily considered more than sufficient whenever a prisoner is accused of some misconduct, but the Superintendent even refused to listen to the very serious charge of assault that our head warder had made before him. This was something new and unexpected in the jail. The Superintendent did not ask a single question of the accused in this case and went away after finishing his round of our ward. He could have easily believed every word of his subordinate if he had wanted to, which course he avoided with much forbearance on his part. We of course appreciated his dispassionate way of handling the situation.

CHAPTER 8

THE LITERARY LEAGUE

OUR strength was increasing through the arrival, one by one, of more terrorist prisoners. Pandit Kishori Lal of the first Lahore Conspiracy Case and S. Tehl Singh, one of the comrades

connected with our Party, had come from Montgomery Jail. The latter was arrested at Dharampur, a suburb of Lahore, in the company of another revolutionary comrade, Bisheshar of Rawalpindi. They had a duel with the police, when S. Tehl Singh with a pistol in his hand and Bisheshar with a knife tried to avoid arrest. A police bullet silenced Bisheshar forever. S. Tehl Singh, terribly distressed at the death of his brave companion, did not run for safety and was arrested. He was tried and sentenced to seven years' rigorous imprisonment.

A later addition to our society was that of Swami Hans Raj of the Suchetgarh Shooting Case. The group to which he belonged was linked with the main revolutionary Party to which all of us belonged. Kasturi Lal, one of the companions of Swami Hans Raj, was, after his arrest at Jammu, being brought by the police to Sialkot when an attempt was made to rescue him. Swami Hans Raj, Pritam Khan, Prabhu Dayal and Jagdish Chandra boarded the compartment of the train in which their comrade was being taken and at the point of a pistol demanded his freedom from the police escort. A regular fight ensued in which one of the policemen while trying to snatch a pistol from one of the revolutionaries was mortally wounded with a knife. Kasturi Lal was rescued but was arrested soon after by the members of another police party travelling in another compartment of the same train. Swami Hans Raj and his three companions made good their escape but were arrested after some months and tried for murder. Pritam Khan was sentenced to death and hanged in Montgomery Jail. Swami Hans Raj got transportation for life while Kasturi Lal and Prabhu Dayal were jailed for three years each. Jagdish Chandra was still an absconder wanted by the police.

Choudhari Sher Jung of Nahan State, a "B" class prisoner serving his sentence of ten years, was transferred to Lahore and came to our ward.

Baba Sundar Singh and Baba Kartar Singh Giani, two Babar Akali prisoners, had also joined us. The coming of these friends, old and new, was like the gradual expanding of our little world within its fast-encircled bounds. The bigger our society, the larger the interests pursued. The place was the same, but it brightened up. The garden was the same but it blossomed forth as we gave more and more of our care and labour to it. There were men to labour when its irrigation system failed; there were experts to give their advice when some gardening plan went wrong. All our main interests were still illegal. Another was

added in the form of a Literary League, set up at the instance of Comrade Tika Ram Sukhan. The proposal was a good one, enthusiastically seconded by Choudhari Sher Jung. The Literary League held its first session immediately after it came into being. It was an astounding success.

Babā Kartar Singh, the gray-haired, gray-bearded Babar Akali who seemed to have no tongue just as he had hardly any teeth, astonished us all with a couplet of his Punjabi poem which said,

" God has also taken to the fair,
More does he for the whites care."

It was a period of inward growth characterised by a will to expand, to improve, to break the bonds of suppressed thought. The League held its meetings every week. Sukhan wrote a eulogy of *Chane ki Dal* (cooked gram) because it was the only article of food he could eat with relish in the jail. Pandit Inderpal described the horrible summer as seen through the eyes of one confined in a solitary cell. Pandit Rupchand's historical poems revived the agonising memory of the days of our country's downfall which had been the subject of his study during the past few months. He had only recently finished Major Basu's *Rise of Christian Power in India*, a book that filled him with "flashes of pain." The witty S. Tara Singh and the "artistically bowed," S. Hazara Singh wrote very beautiful Punjabi poems to the glory of Nature. Choudhari Sher Jung wrote in Hindi, Urdu, and sometimes in English, excellent pieces of prose and poetry. I too produced some verses and short stories mostly related to the period of my confinement as a condemned prisoner.

"Sukhan" had a delicate health and was much reduced in weight. Adequate medical attention or a change in a prisoner's diet on medical grounds was not a matter of right; since it depended on the pleasure or displeasure of the Superintendent, who was our medical officer too. The latter was, however, one day pleased to allow half a pound of milk per day for one month to "Sukhan." The occasion was a memorable one for the medical assistant, the S.A.S. in charge of our ward, who stayed behind when the Superintendent went away, and exclaimed, beaming with satisfaction, "I have tried my best and now a facility has been obtained for you."

The socialist poet "Sukhan" whom he had addressed thus, turned towards him with an exuberant smile. "I know you had to make persistent recommendations, Doctor Sahib," he said

appreciatingly.

"What harm was there in letting the stomach of a good fellow feel a bit elastic and enriched?" added the medical man for the benefit of other listeners. His "well-meaning" recommendations had been in fact against the allowance of half a pound of milk, but "Sukhan" was not the man to belie the friendly professions of the doctor and offered him the necessary thanks.

The good-will shown by all the parties in Sukhan's case stirred the imagination of Pandit Inderpal who saw in it a befitting subject for a congratulatory poem entitled "Sukhan's Milk." The doctor's good wishes about the flexibility of his patient's stomach was specially referred to in the poem.

Malnutrition was ruining many a delicate stomach but genteel desires like those expressed by our doctor were a rare thing in the prison. A sufferer had to complain continuously and struggle hard before the Superintendent could be convinced of the need for medical attention.

Interviews were rare and so were the letters we received from outside. I had, during my imprisonment, got only a couple of letters from outside, one of which was from Lala Sham Lal. He remembered us. I did not know whether my reply had reached him or not. Every right, every facility or concession in the jail depended on our good behaviour. We were indeed completely cut off from the outside world, which meant we were not yet in a position to launch a big struggle for an improvement in our living conditions because the chances of success were small until we could invite sufficient public attention to our cause. The warders who occasionally smuggled things for us were especially cautious about carrying any messages to public men and the press. The strictest control was exercised on our interviews. There was no news about the world; but no censor was ever able to deprive the prisoners of jail gossip. A tragedy of the greatest magnitude that ever occurred in our jail formed the subject of a story which I wrote. Shorn of its emotional contents here it is in brief.

A prisoner had come back from the Andamans when his sentence of transportation for life was about to be completed. The hope of seeing his aged mother was revived in his mind as he reached the shores of our country. She had become blind with the long, long years of waiting for the return of her son. The desire to meet her gained an added intensity from the fact that it was only he who could see and not she. The man was illiterate and so was she. The word mother none-the-less rang

deep into the soul. He, the unfortunate son, had been the cause of her blindness. The crime he had committed was now a thing of the distant past, lost in the slow fire of suffering he had gone through himself and imposed upon his mother. He wanted to open her eyes to the happy prospects of his readmission into the society of the free. The first thing he did after coming into the jail was to write a letter asking her to come and see him.

Little did he know that a jail rule lay in wait for him. He was caught unexpectedly in the clutches of an inhuman device. He was punished for smoking an unlawful cigarette or doing something of the sort. He had expected the interview to take place within a few days. He waited and waited ; but the mother did not come. One day another prisoner belonging to his village who was living with him in the same barrack was called to the jail gate for an interview. " Please find out the reason why my mother has not come," he reminded him.

" What, what has happened to her? " he asked his companion who was looking a bit sad after his return.

" My friend, it was no fault of hers. She did come to the jail gate, but was not allowed to see you as you were recently punished for a jail offence," replied the latter.

" Oh, no interview with my mother! " cried the unhappy lifer and then held his tongue as if he had been struck by sudden terror.

He committed suicide the same night.

CHAPTER 9

SMUGGLING AND STRUGGLING!

THE head warders of the ward were usually the same but the duties of warders were changed every month. A warder has full authority over the prisoners under his charge subject to the control which is exercised upon him by the officers superior to him. He knows, he should rule as strictly as he is himself ruled. He is searched at the gate and may search the prisoners all the time he is on duty inside before being searched again at the time of his exit from the jail. The seventeen rupees that he gets per mensem for day-and-night duties is little conducive

to the honesty expected of him.

A needy prisoner would naturally dislike the warder who refuses to help him in his need. The needy warders have a similar contempt for the prisoner without needs. The smuggling business flourishes with the help of both.

A warder newly sent to our ward had three daughters and four sons to provide for in addition to his wife. He began canvassing like a professional smuggler on the very first day. "I am at your service," he said again and again with all the friendliness one usually finds in men capable of taking risks for the sake of others. He became a friend within a day or two. A man with seven children to support was not to be exploited, at least not by a political prisoner like me. I refused to give him any "work" but he persisted, saying "I shall be most happy when I can prove to be of any use to you." Poverty, abject poverty, in him was speaking and not he. He was asking others too to give him "work." My friends and I decided to agree. I sent him with a chit for ten rupees to a relative's house. He brought me the money deducting two rupees for his trouble.

"What would you buy with the remaining money?" he asked.

"Forty-eight sheets of paper, a bottle of ink, a cake of bathing soap, and a half a pound of hair oil," I replied.

"My little son spilled it in play," he said apologetically, while handing me the bottle he had brought. There was more than half of ink in the bottle and I told him I did not mind the loss. The next time he brought twenty-two sheets of paper in place of forty-eight. He then smuggled in the soap and oil and the account was closed.

He needed rest after such exciting labour. "Let me have a bath," he most deservedly asked. He went to the taps with the soap and oil he had brought and came back after more than an hour's refreshing bath. The bottle of oil was more than half emptied on his head and the cake of soap rubbed off into a thin slice, but his spirits were high by virtue of the satisfaction the cleanliness of his body had given him.

The Superintendent had gone on leave and his Deputy came one day on the weekly round. We were in the working-shed and that day had received exceptionally bad vegetables. We took out of the vegetable pan a shredded rope-like substance about a foot long which was nothing but the adhesive fibrous material of a boiled vegetable. The Deputy felt piqued and told us not to air our protests but to eat meekly the salt and bread of the prison which should always be agreeable to the palate.

"It is not the question of the palate but of the *dalis* which swallow up the pick of the entire garden-products," put in S. Bachint Singh, Babar Akali.

The Deputy was enraged and threatened us with a lathi charge if we did not show respect to his authority.

We too had something to tell him about our experience of bullies like him. He felt a bit unnerved and slipped out of the working-shed, which was immediately locked after him. He now stood outside vociferating about the lax discipline in our ward. He vented his ire upon our garden which was green with turnips and radishes, etc.

"Root the garden out!" thundered the Deputy Superintendent. "I shall never allow unauthorised growing of vegetables here," he told his subordinates, who effaced the garden out of existence in no time.

The Superintendent came next week and saw us. He agreed to the legalisation of our garden. As to our complaint against the bad treatment of his deputy he said nothing, but he had given proof of his desire to compromise with us. There was now no need to smuggle seeds from outside because the Superintendent allowed them from the jail garden.

We had enough space for cultivation of flowers and vegetables but the earth was clayey, containing big pits of debris here and there. A vein of broken bricks was found running through most of the "arable land" which required hard pick-and-shovel labour for months. We rooted out worthless trees and planted fruit trees instead. There came into being at the end of a year, a well kept, well groomed garden with fruit trees planted in a row in front of the twenty cells, along with beds of vegetables and flowers.

I had made the gardening work a hobby and was more interested in it than anyone else.

Meanwhile our studies as well as activities of the Literary League had not suffered from lack of interest. The paucity of books was a drawback that we could make good by more literary work.

Many of us had grown weak, because of the deficient diet. Pandit Kishori Lal, S. Hazara Singh, Pandits Inderpal and Rupchand had especially lost much weight. Rupchand had lately been suffering from bleeding piles and looked much pulled down. I too fell a victim to the same malady but there was no feeling of lassitude.

A change, great or small, had come over all. It was the result of our social life taking shape under difficult circumstances. We

were in the fighting arena for days, months, and years ; and had developed habits that were suited to our life. The viewpoints of the prisoners and the officials ran along different paths even when there was no active conflict between them ; but we were losing our bitterness, and taking the pinpricks of the unsympathetic official attitude less and less seriously. Our minds had generalised the situation and come to recognise that our life followed a certain pattern without any striking deviations from it. The earth had begun to nourish us with its moisture as if it were injecting healthy blood into our veins. 'Restrictions and limitations squeezed us hard but the love for one another that filled our hearts, eased the situation. The authorities, when they would leave us alone, went out of our minds and we forgot ourselves in intellectual pursuits. It was indeed comforting to lose the sense of time and not differentiate between a day and a day, a month and a month and a year and a year. The slightest intrusion of a jail officer could, however, break this unnatural peace.

The tedium of our labour hours was relieved by friendly discussions and non-serious dissertations. Pandit Inderpal took up the cudgels on behalf of Kangra his home district, and Sardars Tara Singh and Hazara Singh defended Gurdaspur. The history of both districts, floods, rains, clouds and all the natural phenomena were utilised as weapons in the wordy warfare that went on for months between the two parties. Not all were silent listeners because intruders were not unwelcome. Things came to acquire weird meanings and strange functions. A mountain of Kangra attacked a field of Gurdaspur and the rumbling noise of thunder reached our ears. The warfare went on until the tag-making was finished, and was resumed every day with fresh vigour. Most of us had read about socialism and gained other forms of scientific knowledge such as of biology, psychology, astronomy, to the extent that our limited conditions permitted. We would exchange views upon political and social issues and express them at the weekly meeting of the Literary League. Terrorism was, to me as well as to the majority of us, no more than a bygone phase, an initial form of struggle reminiscent of the days when we had no clear conception of the mass psychology of the people of our country. A sustained struggle, in the words of Lala Sham Lal, was conducive to long-range thinking, and though we never looked disparagingly on our distant past, we had nevertheless mentally advanced far beyond it and were confident of doing better and more substantial and solid work

when the future readmitted us into the society of the free.

Many an officer had come and gone and hundreds of warders had come into contact with us. Another Deputy Superintendent had taken charge. It was his first day he came into our ward. He knew Ch. Sher Jung when the latter was confined in Multan Jail and stood talking with him in front of his cell which was the second in the first row of ten. We were standing outside the second row, waiting to meet the new Deputy ; but he had expected us to come to the ward-gate to receive him. He continued talking to Ch. Sher Jung, the only " B " class prisoner in our ward, and then went away without seeing us. He had felt slighted. Next day he sent word to us through the head warder-in-charge that we should sit in a line before our respective cells at the time of his visit as the rules of the " C " class prisoners stipulated and not look like an irregular mob aimlessly gathered. We refused to be " disciplined " and to meet his taste in this matter. He became angry. He came after a day or two and one of us, Pandit Kishori Lal, complained to him about the tattered condition of his clothes.

" They are still serviceable," he replied authoritatively and wanted to search the cell of Pandit Kishori Lal. He saw a spare piece of cloth and threateningly inquired, " You agitators and mischief makers, how dare you make unnecessary complaints while you keep unauthorised things with you! "

" I am not used to insulting remarks," said Pandit Kishori Lal coolly.

" I shall teach you to be respectful to an officer of the jail," thundered the Deputy.

" Do what you can! " retorted the Pandit.

" Speak one word more, and I shall have all of you lathi-charged here and now," cried he, seeing that many of us had come before Pandit Kishori Lal's cell.

" We are ready for your lathi-charge," was our calm reply.

He ordered the warders to lock us in at once, and search each of the prisoners and his cell minutely.

We hid our writing materials as best we could, and a thorough search ensued. Many inoffensive things were taken out and placed in a heap in the courtyard. The Deputy ordered them to be locked up in the vacant kitchen room and went away.

The next day was a Sunday, and they did not open our cells at all. We were not used to answering the calls of Nature in our cells and had no desire to eat our food, unless we had washed and bathed. A hunger-strike was a possibility in the

mood we were in at the time. The Deputy, however, took counsel with the Superintendent and relaxed. In the evening our officer-in-charge unlocked all of us, and returned our belongings which had been taken away from us. But we refused to have our food and said that the good-will the Deputy had vicariously shown through his assistant could mean little to us unless he apologised for the threatening attitude he had unnecessarily adopted.

The Deputy agreed to come himself next morning ; but he was prepared to tender an apology, not before all but only before any two of our chosen representatives. We agreed, and the quarrel was amicably settled, largely because of the magnanimity of his heart, as our representatives told him on behalf of us all.

We had been making two hundred tags daily. The Superintendent one day told us that he had enhanced the scale of the *moshaqqat* to three hundred every day and that we should work accordingly.

We came to know that a large number of prisoners had refused to work according to the new scale but were now gradually increasing their work under the threats of the officers. It was a monotonous nerve-racking task and we did it solely for the sake of peaceful relations with the officers. What was the incentive to any prison-labour at all? The lure of remission was not for us, the political prisoners with sentences of transportation for life. Take the Mahatmaji's case for instance ; he had been in jail for about twenty-three years, with the lawfully earned remission of six years excluded, which meant that he had undergone about twenty-nine years of imprisonment. Why should we yield to a torture of our nerves for nothing? With this idea in the background we held a consultation amongst ourselves and decided to resist the imposition of the revised scale.

The Superintendent repeated his orders on the next parade and we told him of our lack of interest in the work and its effects upon our health ; but he was not convinced by our arguments. Next time he employed mild threats and was more serious than he had hitherto been. But we had resolved not to yield. He emphatically told us, " I know you can easily double your *moshaqqat*. Many of you finish it in less than two hours and nobody does more than three hours daily. I only ask you to make a fifty per cent. increase. Do it right now, or you will be dealt with according to the regulation for disobedient prisoners."

S. Bachint Singh spoke for all of us. " You know," he said, " that if we had been convinced that we ought to increase our

us, could not now stop his tongue and burst out to the surprise of all, " You stealthily go to the prisoners at work in order to find many of them sitting idle. You do not feel satisfied that they have already finished their *moshaqqat*. You employ threats to make them do much more than they would willingly. And what do the prisoners gain for their added troubles? How many of us are weak in health and have been asking for a long while for medical attention? One of us, S. Hazara Singh, is five feet nine inches and his weight is only ninety-eight pounds! What have you done for him? There are other instances—those of Pandit Kishori Lal, Rupchand and many others. Do you as a medical man advise those suffering from piles or other diseases to sit longer and suffer more? We shall never accept that advice though you may not hesitate to offer it. None of us is going to submit to your threats! " With these words of Mahatmaji the matter had gone from bad to worse for the highest authority in the jail. He realised that the wind was blowing against him, and felt the need for a dignified retreat.

" Give them *Bund*,—if they won't do the tags," he ordered the Deputy Superintendent, and hurriedly went out of the working-shed.

In my cell at night I went over the events of the day in my mind. We were certainly capable of performing more labour than we did, in spite of our grievances and our indifferent health. Our refusal was nothing but the expression of our will to assert our freedom. The Superintendent had more reason on his side, no doubt, because he was of a more calculating and deliberate disposition than any of us. But he was possessed of that absolute authority which creates nothing but terror and cowardice in the ignorant, and a blind spirit of defiance in politically conscious prisoners like us. We could never do away with our suspicions, nor rest assured that his powers were to be used for the benefit of those under his despotic rule. He could put us in the wrong by being magnanimous, when we expected him to be revengeful. He could impress us with his tactful dealing. But never could he inspire faith in us. We had to keep on fighting his power, unless our circumstances changed. And he was in a sense right in never believing in the genuineness of our maladies and grievances.

About two hundred yards from our ward were the buildings of the Punjab Mental Hospital; the cries of an insane woman coming from that direction interrupted my thoughts again and again. The hospital was another jail for a different category of

people. The woman's plaintive shrieking continued far into the night and I could not sleep. Was she conscious of her life? Was she conscious of the beating of her heart? Could any light, any ray of hope, penetrate the darkness of her soul? She had evidently no heartfelt need for sympathy. Then why cry so much, so long? She had nothing but wails to offer to the world surrounding her. She exercised a pessimistic influence and inspired me with melancholy thoughts. A resounding cry for freedom, for life, rose out of my heart and I felt as though the whole of my past had rolled into one startling echo for my ears. It dissipated the melancholy effects upon my mind and cleared my vision for a comprehensive view. There had been a setback here and there but I had on the whole made satisfactory progress; the spirit of a continuous forward struggle had never failed me.

CHAPTER 10

THINGS MUST CHANGE

THE year 1937 saw the advent of popular ministries in the provinces. The electorate had given their verdict in favour of the Indian National Congress whose representatives were returned to power in seven out of the eleven provinces of British India and held a single-party majority in two. The Congress was thus enabled to take the country forward on the road of independence by using the offices as a means towards bringing about better and more hopeful conditions. A new era of constitutional progress was in sight. The foreign masters were still in the saddle and the nominal reforms were but a diversion for our national movement, but the governors in the provinces gave assurances of a fair trial and the Congress ministries assumed power.

Some changes were made in jail administration. Our province also moved a bit in the right direction in its praiseworthy act of abolishing "Kolhu" and "Kharas" labours. The prisoners were allowed a daily paper, the *Statesman*. We had the privilege of learning something of what happened in our country. It was a coveted privilege indeed. It was natural to expect better treatment for political prisoners from the so-called popular ministry, because as a matter of common sense

the change of government should have been followed by a change for the better in the plight of those in prison for political offences.

Any event of great importance happening in the country has as a rule its repercussions upon the minds of the prisoners. A governor's or a minister's visit to the jail, the end of a war, the inauguration of a new parliament, the accession to the throne of a new king, or any other occasion for great public rejoicings tends to raise their hopes and sets gossip afoot. The old prisoners tell the new about what had happened, for example, after the end of the Great War, or at the Great Darbar of 1912, and make them imbibe the gladdening effect of large-scale jail deliverances and substantial remissions of bygone days.

In 1935 the celebration of the King's Silver Jubilee had raised great expectations.

"The Jugni is coming, coming, be prepared for better luck!" one prisoner would say to another, and make a forecast about big cuts in the days of their imprisonment. Some were sure of one month's remission per year for everyone sentenced to more than a year. The jail officers helped not a little in the raising of such hopes. But the Silver Jubilee had come and gone and brought nothing for them. The disappointment of the prisoners was evident. One day our comrade Tika Ram Sukhan, an albino, red of skin and grey of hair, with long flowing locks, came into the jail, when a prisoner seeing him go towards the *siyasat khana*, showed him to another prisoner, and exclaimed,

"See, friend, the Jugni has come!" The psychology of the prisoners is the same everywhere and we too had expected a better classification for political prisoners, if nothing else, from the new ministry.

There were more than three hundred terrorist prisoners in the Andamans, belonging to various provinces, including those under the Congress rule. Old-time prisoners had become Congress ministers in charge of law and order. The Andaman prisoners were far from their homes, completely cut off from their country, *without any means, legal or illegal, of making their plight known to their countrymen.* They too had expected that the Government would take steps to improve their lot. They looked hopefully towards the future, but no new developments of a reassuring nature took place, and they felt that nothing could be more satisfying to the alien Government than the existing arrangements under which they were kept out of India deprived of every possible chance of public support in favour of removing their grievances.

A number of prisoners from the Punjab and Bihar were of the opinion that they should demand repatriation and release and should declare a hunger-strike if the Government refused to take any steps in that direction.

We read in the *Statesman* the communique issued by the Government of India announcing the hunger-strike of more than three hundred prisoners in the Andamans. A wave of sympathy swept over the whole of the country and she awoke at last to recognise her forgotten sons. The result was a widespread agitation in favour of their demands.

Mahatma Gandhi took the cause of the prisoners in his own hands and wired to them to call off their hunger-strike. They had addressed a joint letter to the Mahatma informing him that they had given up their faith in terrorism. This denunciation of their former creed strengthened the hands of the Mahatma and he began corresponding with the Viceroy on the issue of the prisoners' repatriation and release.

Eventually the demand for repatriation was accepted by the Government and they came back to the country with high hopes that their second demand would be pressed for with more vigour.

Ten of them, Baba Gurmukh Singh (of the 1914-15 conspiracy case), Dr. Gaya Parshad, Vijay Kumar Sinha, Jai Dev Kapur, Kamal Nath Tewari and Shiv Varma (of the first Lahore conspiracy case) and Mehta Khushi Ram, Muni Raj and Hazara Singh (of the Ootacamund dacoity case) and Mr. Dhanwantari (of the Delhi conspiracy case) at one time an absconder in our case, came to join us in the Central Jail, Lahore.

Baba Gurmukh Singh had come during the last war from America along with hundreds of other Indians to fight for India's independence. He was convicted for conspiracy and sentenced to transportation for life. He made good his escape while he was being transferred from one jail to another, in 1922. He again plunged himself into political work, and went to Russia, became a communist and came back from that country when his case-fellows were released from jail in 1930, to re-organise his old comrades. He restarted the work of the Ghadr Party in India, worked in the villages and gave a stimulus to the organisation of *Kisans*. He remained very active during his absconding life till he was again arrested in 1936. Sent to the Andamans, he began to canvass support for putting up a united demand for repatriation and release of all terrorist prisoners. And now here he was, back in the jail of his province.

They were of the opinion that the masses of all countries had

gone ahead towards socialism by leaps and bounds while we were in jail. They were quite confident of their release and would not believe us when we told them that the ministries in the Punjab and Bengal had not changed in character and were pursuing the same reactionary policy towards political prisoners as had been laid down by their predecessors. The Andaman comrades had come in the spirit of trained teachers and seemed isolated in the apathetic and not very congenial atmosphere of the Punjab.

Baba Gurmukh Singh was of the view that another hunger-strike would become necessary for enforcing the demand for release.

The Minister for Jails came to visit us one day and we availed ourselves of the opportunity to acquaint him with the predicament of the "C" class political prisoners.

"What about our release?" asked Baba Gurmukh Singh; and the Minister, showing surprise, replied, "Release! Our ministry is not contemplating the release of terrorist prisoners!"

Babaji, a bit taken aback at this frank avowal of policy, tried to enlighten the Minister on the subject and told him of an assurance about repatriation and release that had been given to them in the Andamans.

The Minister scanned the face of the old revolutionary and inquired, "Who gave you the assurance? Not our ministry of course!"

Babaji explained in detail that Mahatma Gandhi had exchanged letters with them; and having got the assurance from all of them that they had abjured their faith in terrorism, had corresponded with the Viceroy on the subject of repatriation and release. We were brought back to the country on that account.

"But you have given us no such assurance!" remarked the Minister.

Babaji replied a bit impatiently, "Our letter denouncing terrorism had been sent to Mahatmaji through you," and added after a pause, "You too represent the people. What is the difference between you and the old bureaucracy if you are not going to consider our question after the inauguration of provincial autonomy?"

The Honourable Minister felt offended at the last words of Baba Gurmukh Singh; and not showing further inclination for talk, left our ward. We had our meals and were locked up for the night a few minutes later.

The Superintendent was very critical next day of Babaji's not behaving properly towards the Minister.

After a couple of days Babaji was called to the jail gate by the Deputy Superintendent for an interview. Then he saw that the police were waiting to escort him to Multan Jail.

"You ought to have informed me before of my transfer so that I could have brought my things with me," complained Babaji to the Deputy Superintendent.

"Now go directly with the police guard and your articles will be sent to you afterwards," ordered the Deputy.

Babaji was not willing to go unless he was allowed to fetch his belongings. The Deputy Superintendent ordered the police to handcuff him by force. They did so and dragged him out to the prison van. We learnt of his being taken away like this in the evening and realised how helpless we were at times.

Within a few days they transferred many of our comrades on account of a shortage of accommodation in the ward. Pandit Inderpal, Malik Kundan Lal, Swami Hansraj, S. Tara Singh and S. Hazara Singh were taken to Montgomery Jail. We had been discussing our intended hunger-strike for the past few days and parted with our comrades with the seriousness of a future life-and-death struggle. It would have been a great privilege to suffer together, but fate would not have it so.

Comrades Vijay Kumar, Kamal Nath, Gaya Parshad, Jai Dev and Shiv Varma belonged to the United Provinces and Bihar where Congress ministries were functioning. They were confident that the Congress would sympathetically consider their case. But our province had the ministers whom our foreign rulers themselves would have gladly nominated. We had heard their point of view from the Minister for Jails, and had now to make ourselves heard by the tribunal of the public conscience! A hunger-strike was the only backing that we could give to our demand for release, and better treatment in the meanwhile.

News reached us that Baba Gurmukh Singh was already on hunger-strike in the Multan Jail. The United Provinces and Bihar comrades had applied for a transfer to their respective provinces and were not in favour of going on hunger-strike. Two or three others were in bad health. The remaining eleven of us, namely, comrades Dhanwantari, Sher Jung, Rupchand, Jahangiri Lal, Bachint Singh, S. Sundar Singh, Uddham Singh, Hazara Singh, Muni Lal, Khushi Ram Mehta and I prepared an application in which we gave in detail the points in favour of our release and also the reasons for our immediately going on hunger-strike. A

copy of that application was smuggled outside for our friends and sympathisers.

Orders for the classification of Pandit Rupchand, Jahangiri Lal and Pandit Kishori Lal as "B" class prisoners had been issued by the Government some days before. The five comrades belonging to the United Provinces and Bihar and Malik Kundan Lal had only been allowed "B" class diet. But we were not willing to be misled by this classification of a few of us, into sidetracking the main issue of the release of all political prisoners. We had demanded that the distinction of "B" and "C" class amongst political prisoners should cease and that all should be treated better.

CHAPTER 11

THE HUNGER-STRIKE

ON the morning of the 11th of January, we packed our private belongings, books, etc., into cloth-bags and asked the head warder-in-charge to open the godown. He saw us deposit our bundles there and at once realised our purpose. He immediately went to report after locking the godown again. The Assistant Superintendent-in-charge came to see us and we handed him our application to the Government. A few minutes later the Superintendent also came. He said we were taking the step too hastily and ought to give notice to the Government for the consideration of our demands, before resorting to hunger-strike. Had we given the Superintendent the chance, he would have dispersed all of us to various jails, one here and one there, and concerted action would have been difficult. The authorities could have advantageously carried out their oft-tried measures of combating hunger-strikes. He was really unhappy that we had not given him an opportunity to do something for us, before taking such a serious step. We did not confuse this humane aspect of his nature with his official attitude. He saw that his persuasion failed in making us postpone our step and remarked, "Well, any way I don't consider this hunger-strike as a protest against the jail authorities. It concerns the Punjab Government only and I need not bother!"

We agreed with him that it had nothing to do with him.

The hunger-strikers were taken to Ward No. 14 Old, on his orders. On reaching there Pandit Rupchand remarked, "We have come back to our old home."

"Yes, nothing has changed in it," I replied, after casting a look at the place, and added, "It is as familiar to us as if we had never left it."

The same dirty cells, bearing an age-old narrowness of space as well as of outlook, carrying the unchanging marks of wretched human lives lived there, seemed to be saying to me "Come, come inside like an old friend without casting a disparaging look," and we, the old inhabitants of the place, in fact did feel at home. I told the new comrades a story or two reminiscent of old times, and they too were interested in the place.

They locked seven of us in the cells of the "Badmash Line" and the remaining four in the outer row at the back of it. We had brought nothing except the clothes that each was wearing and a book or two of a religious or seemingly religious character that could not be disallowed by the jail authorities. I had with me Tagore's *Gitanjali* and *Guru Gobind Singh's Life* by Professor Kartar Singh. Pandit Rupchand had brought the Bengali version of *Gitanjali*. The title of the book sounded religious and the officers did not object to it. The seven on that side called to the four on this side (I was one of them) out of their cells and held a lively conversation. In the evening I called Pandit Rupchand aloud, "How are you?"

He, a sufferer from chronic constipation, was feeling very light that day and gaily replied, "I feel better today! I have been reading the song offerings of the illustrious poet with a lucidity of mind never experienced before and seem to have imbibed the exhilarating effect of the poet's inspiring flights."

I too felt light and easy. The craving for food was dispelled by a strong resolve to carry on the fight in a hostile environment. There was the risk of death or permanent injury to one's health; but we were voluntarily seeking risks and injuries. It was like rising one morning from sleep and finding an essentially changed world where hunger, thirst, physical weakness, obstinacy, a fighting mood, in short all things we do not normally desire, had become extremely desirable. We had to combat the impulses of self-preservation so far as they hindered our path. We were at ease in mind because everything was well thought out and planned in conformity with the best interests of our life in the jail.

Ch. Sher Jung next day inquired from all how they fared.

When nobody told him about any feeling of hunger, he raised his voice to a high pitch and remarked, "Listen all of you! The residue in your bowels is putrefying, that is why you don't feel hungry. Mine are clean and my stomach is constantly demanding food! Take a purgative, that is what you badly need!"

We made fun of his hunger. A purgative was a necessity indeed, but we were not given even a laxative. "My duty is to see that you do not lose weight and become weak," said the Superintendent. He advised us complete rest. He asked us not to walk in the cells, and preserve our energies. But what could we do, for twenty-four hours in the cells, except go on walking a few steps forwards and backwards, weaving like the spider the web of our thoughts which came in prolific abundance. My mind showed an unusual alacrity and rested nowhere in its wanderings. Gay and light, I flitted from place to place and an occasional sip from *Gitanjali* or *Guru Gobind Singh's Life* was sufficient to sustain me for long hours of lonely wanderings.

The vacant cells in our row were being cleaned and a new doctor came on the fourth day, to make use of those cells. He established his office, his store-room and a small dispensary in different cells. He visited all of us one by one in the evening and inquired about our health. We told him that we were hale and hearty and did not need any medical assistance.

On the fifth day there was unusual activity in those cells, and doctors and lambardars swarmed into the ward. Never had forcible feeding begun so early in any hunger-strike we knew of. In our view, the Superintendent was bent upon giving us no chance of quickly reaching the stage of exhaustion. We felt that the struggle would be much prolonged if he succeeded. Some of us thought that they would in the beginning feed only those who were more weak and not all of us. The Superintendent had come and looked carefully into the eyes of every one of us, and seen the chart of our weights. "How are you?" he had asked me and I had replied, "Quite fit!" I did not get the impression that he was going to feed me.

The first victim to forcible feeding was Sirdar Bachint Singh, in the cell next to mine. At about five in the evening his cell was unlocked and a force of lambardars, about a dozen strong, entered in. He was a man with an experience of several hunger-strikes in which he had taken part and all listened to the noise of the hand-to-hand struggle that ensued when they tried to overpower him. All became quiet within a quarter of an hour. After a few minutes the Superintendent appeared before my cell.

"Don't you feel a bit weak?" he enquired.

"Not at all," was my prompt reply.

He smiled a little and the head warder behind him came forward to unlock my cell. The party of stalwart lambardars marched in. I at once stepped aside and took a corner.

"Don't exert yourself, keep to the bed," advised the Superintendent again and again. I pushed my captors away several times and the scuffle with them continued for some minutes but they were too many for me. They overpowered me at last and held me fast upon the bedstead. The elderly Sikh doctor, a feeding expert, came in with the feeding apparatus. My legs and arms were secured fast by half a dozen men and my head caught firmly by four strong hands without allowing it any movement. I lay supine, panting heavily. The doctor inserted the rubber tube into my nostril. A few drops of blood and watery fluid flowed out of it, and water came into my eyes too. The painful grating sensation continued for a few seconds and then the tube reached my gullet. In a few minutes the feeding cup was emptied into my stomach and the tube taken out. All those in the room went out. My door was locked. The food was irritating me like poison. I tried to vomit it out in vain. I washed my eyes and nose and then stood listening to the noise in the next cell. It was the same with all without any exception. Having finished their job, the doctors went away and peace again reigned in our ward. We called one another and talked about what we could do.

"Nothing but take the blows lying down," Mehta Khushi Ram laughingly told us.

The feeling of helplessness was common, Pandit Rupchand and one or two others had succeeded in vomiting out the enforced food. Some others had tried and failed. Our sole concern was to foil the attempts of the doctors to maintain our strength. Resisting as much as we could even to the point of utter exhaustion was one of the methods. Another was to continue walking for hours inside the cell. Ch. Sher Jung advised hard exercise, but it was not practical for most of us.

They began to feed us twice daily. Only a few could vomit out the contents of their stomach after feeding, and their weights were decreasing daily. The doctors consulted literature on hunger-strikes and found out a device for checking this vomiting which had been made automatic. They would first fill with water the stomach of the hunger-striker with a vomiting tendency and let him vomit. They would then pour in the liquid diet, and not let

him leave his bed for some time after the feeding. The device met with cent per cent success. Our weights became almost constant. We were loosing in strength but very slowly.

As the days went by we insisted more and more on being allowed books other than religious ones and the Superintendent agreed at last to let us have some from the jail library. I got *Demos* by George Gissing and *If Winter Comes* by Hutchinson. There was no mental fatigue at all. The taste for food had lent itself to the hunger for reading matter. The books I got proved to be of absorbing interest.

We could not have any news of the outside world because of the strictest vigilance maintained against any communication reaching the hunger-strikers. The Superintendent, however, did not miss any chance of giving us discouraging items of information, such as "the Government circles are completely unmoved. They have absolutely refused to consider your case unless you give up the hunger-strike," or "such and such eminent Congress leaders have expressed their views against your step." He showed us telegrams that advised us to break the fast. He read the expressions on our faces and sent daily reports to the authorities. "None of you is susceptible to reason. The trouble is that you are causing unnecessary trouble to the already over-worked jail-staff," was his usual refrain. He would round off his criticism by a realistic observation about our total inability to produce an impression upon the all-powerful Government. No one argued with him.

One day a prisoner-friend occupying a privileged position in the jail brought us the news that our comrades in Multan and Montgomery jails too were on hunger-strike. The news was confirmed by the casual remark of one of the doctors to another doctor. The latter was to take charge of the hunger-strikers at the latter place and had come to see our forcible feeding with a view to gaining necessary experience and knowledge.

We resisted hard morning and evening feedings, not because there was any chance of avoiding the food, but because it was a necessary part of our struggle. Baba Sunder Singh's arm was dislocated one day, but he continued to resist with the other arm. Minor injuries and scratches were usual; but we could not retaliate against the prisoner lambardars, for whom it was no pleasant job, but an enforced duty to use force against us. Moreover ours was a moral fight against the Government for justice and better treatment for all political prisoners. Non-political prisoners, or even the jail officers, had nothing to do with it.

They had by and by acquired the experience of employing force with skill ; care and caution were replacing their former crude and evidently brutal method. We were growing physically weaker slowly though surely. A fortnight had passed and brought the confidence to us that the feeding could not stop the gradual deterioration of our health, which was inevitable in spite of all the Superintendent's precautionary measures. If we could go so far as to sacrifice a few lives, we were sure to win. "Go on, go on without an idea of yielding," was our mood as well as our battle cry.

They began to unlock our cells one afternoon and asked us to come out. Dr. Gopi Chand Bhargava of Lahore and Mr. Mohan Lal Saxena, President of the United Provinces Provincial Congress Committee, had come to see us. They came with the Superintendent, and we all sat in the compound of the Badmash Line.

Mr. Saxena told us about the difficulties that had arisen because of our hunger-strike. "We have accepted ministries for the sake of a great cause," he said, and asked, "how can we remain in office while you are dying?"

Mr. Dhanwantari reminded him of the promises that had been made to the Andaman prisoners and explained the circumstances that had forced the hunger-strike upon us.

Mr. Saxena, unconvinced, went on, "You ought not to have taken this step. Your question was not one which could be ignored ; and we would have solved it in due time. Our ministry has taken up the cause of the release of the political prisoners in our province. We are bent upon creating a deadlock over this issue. Give up your hunger-strike and wait for the results of our efforts."

"Can you assure us that the Punjab ministry will follow your line?" we asked, reminding him thereby that ours was not a Congress province.

"You are harassing none but us, who are your own, by continuing the hunger-strike," insisted Mr. Saxena.

We told him that there was no going back now. We were sure that the cause of the political prisoners in our province would suffer badly if we abandoned our hunger-strike without giving any thought to the hopeless situation of the prisoners in our province.

Mr. Saxena was disappointed with our refusal ; but he went on pressing his point, while some of us talked to Dr. Gopi Chand, and learnt from him about the developments that had taken place after our hunger-strike. A great demonstration was held before

the Assembly Chamber in spite of the Government order banning all processions. Public opinion was being aroused in favour of our demand. All this was encouraging news. But Doctorji was pessimistic about the Government attitude and advised us to have no illusions about our ability to influence the reactionary ministry of the province through suffering, however great.

Raizada Hans Raj, another prominent Congress leader, came to see us a few days later. He too brought nothing from the Government side and on his own account advised us to give up the hunger-strike. These interviews were the only occasions on which we could see one another; and we were happy to find all the comrades in the best of moods. At these moments we discussed how to resist more forcefully, and becoming weaker and weaker physically.

I had written an unauthorised letter to L. Sham Lalji before starting upon the hunger-strike, explaining in full our reasons for the step and requesting him to interfere only when there was some likelihood of our demand being accepted by the Government. We knew how anxious he would be; and my letter was meant more to keep him from coming than for any other purpose, because of the unpleasant prospect of having to say a definite "no" to him.

Nevertheless, contrary to our expectation, he turned up one day in the company of Dr. Gopi Chand, and we were all unlocked to meet them. Unhappy at his coming, I wondered what to say to him. "We were not expecting a visit from you," I remarked, and presently realising that my tone lacked in geniality, added, "but it is one of the good points of our present step that you have been allowed to see us."

He looked at me, then at the others, smiled and said, "I let a month pass and was not willing to come even now, but was compelled to do so by the relatives of. . . . They told me that his condition was critical, that he was dying, but I see that, weak though you all are, there was much exaggeration in the information given to me. His relatives had also given me the impression that 'X' wanted to meet me as soon as possible."

"Who gave them the false news?" asked 'X' in surprise.

"I do not know," replied Lalaji.

"No one except some jail employee could have tried to frighten them with an imaginary description of the serious condition of some of us," was the view expressed by Pandit Rupchand.

"Never mind," observed Lalaji with evident satisfaction at seeing us all in high spirits. He then proceeded to give his own

reactions about the situation. "Now that I am here, I must tell you the right thing," he said and went on thus: "What do you expect from the Government which would have been only too happy to hang all of you? Terrorists you are for them and must remain so in spite of your denouncing your former faith in terrorism. Congressites like me have, since the declaration of your changed views, regarded you as the vanguard of the forces struggling for freedom, but the Punjab ministry entertains no kind thoughts towards you. Can you move their hearts, even with one or two deaths that might result from this hunger-strike? Take it from me that you can influence only those who are, more or less, sympathetic towards you or the independence movement of our country. You can only exert pressure upon those whom you call your own, and you have fully succeeded in this."

How can we turn back now without achieving some concrete result? We put this question to Lalaji and he replied, "I think persistence in your protest unnecessary any more. Listen! you have brought the question of political prisoners to the forefront. The ministry here might never accept all of your demands, but they might take some half-way steps. All depends upon how much pressure the Congress can put upon them. You have roused much public sympathy for your cause. Let us exploit this hopeful situation, as far as possible!" Lalaji further informed us that Mahatma Gandhi had addressed a pathetic appeal to us through the Press, saying that his days were numbered and that he would leave no stone unturned to see us outside. Lalaji asked us to believe in the pledge of honour given by the Congress leaders, never to feel peace and comfort until they secure our release. He told us that the Congress ministers in Bihar and the United Provinces had resigned over the issue of terrorist prisoners' release.

Dr. Gopi Chand informed us that our case would be further taken up at the coming session of the All-India Congress. He reminded us of the death of Jatindar Nath Das of the first Lahore Conspiracy Case, who had given his life during a hunger-strike, resorted to for securing better classification for all political prisoners. The Government had yielded to his demand then, but had taken away the classes of all prisoners of that case after the day of their conviction. They, he told us, might yield, even now, to order release in deserving cases according to their view but very few could hope to benefit by their leniency. They have, he said, because of the pressure of our hunger-strike, chalked out a policy of releasing Babar Akali prisoners; and a few other

names may be added to the list, but that is all that is expected of their reactionary and niggardly attitude. "Be patient and see what the Congress can do for you," advised the Doctor sahib.

Both the leaders had told us nothing but the truth, the hard truth. We held a brief consultation amongst ourselves and then informed them that we were ready to call off the hunger-strike if the Congress attitude towards the question of our release and better treatment was given practical shape in the form of a resolution passed and a programme chalked out at the All-India session which was to take place shortly. We also desired a personal letter from Mahatmaji addressed to us on the lines of his statement to the Press. Lalaji and Doctor sahib agreed to put our case forcefully at the session. They concurred with us that, meanwhile, the hunger-strike should go on.

How the issue had been clarified and the hard reality, free from all obscurity, come out before us! We could indeed hope for nothing from our political opponents, whose sole aim was to maintain themselves by crushing the progressive forces aligned against them and by suppressing the just demands of those whom they had imprisoned for political reasons. We could only put our case before the public and had done so to the best of our ability. We could put no more than necessary pressure upon the patriotic organisation sympathetic towards our cause. Our hopes lay not merely in our capacity to suffer, but in the mass support that we could enlist in our favour. None of us had any illusions about effecting a change of heart in our alien rulers. Concessions must be forced from them and that was the one simple truth we had in our mind. It emerged with added brightness from our present struggle. . . . The progress of units was uniform with the progress of the organisation. We could only believe in mass-awakening, in the steady progressive march of our countrymen towards the common goal. If the country had power, it must come to our aid.

Lala Sham Lal and Dr. Gopi Chand Bhargava came back from the Tripuri Session of the Congress on the afternoon of Feb. 24, 1938. They brought with them the copy of the resolution on political prisoners and also a letter from Mahatma Gandhi, asking us to break our fast.

"What about our comrades in the Multan and Montgomery jails? Should we not all break the fast together?" asked Mr. Dhanwantari.

"No! Break yours first and I shall take the happy news to

them," replied Lala Sham Lal with ingenuity, and smiled a broad good-natured smile.

He ordered oranges from outside ; and the jail authorities arranged for milk. We broke our fast after having kept it for a month and a half.

We had the opportunity of having a talk with him for about half an hour. He had grown old and was suffering from high blood pressure in addition to the chronic gout trouble. He told us with much feeling that his health debarred him from taking an active part in the day-to-day activity of the Congress. His mission, he said, was to see us employing our youthful energies in the cause of the country, while he was still living. He was usually not allowed to have an interview with us, and this, he thought, would be his last.

" We hope to gain more power at the Centre, and then we can exert pressure on the provincial Government which refuses to release you now. Our country would be very unfortunate if it does not achieve sufficient power to obtain your freedom in a year or two." With these touching words, he bade us good-bye and was gone.

CHAPTER 12

AFTER-THOUGHTS AND AFTER-EFFECTS

THE hunger-strike had its mental as well as physical after-effects. It was nothing more than a cry for justice, for peace, for freedom, addressed more to our countrymen than to our imperialist masters. There was the urge in us to fight the latter and to seek the help of the former. There was the hunger in us to reach the masses and we had forged a temporary link. The ceaseless monotony of our life had necessitated a clash, a break through a resistance with the wherewithal of our lives. Never had I for a single moment harboured the illusion that our release was coming ; neither had I ever expected " B " class facilities for all. The less I expected the more bitterly did I want to struggle. There was no idea of suicide in my mind, but I hoped to meet death, the logical conclusion of an intense struggle carried on to its bitter end. In other words, I wanted to plunge myself with

all my strength into a dangerous and difficult struggle. This was obviously not the attitude of mind of the majority of my comrades. Those belonging to the Congress provinces were naturally optimistic about the outcome of the hunger-strike.

But for the interference of Lala Sham Lal we would have gone on, till a crisis had been reached ; a serious situation would have arisen, because it was not for us to call a halt. In view of the completely indifferent attitude of the Government, none of us would have known where to stop. But when it came to relying upon the people, there was no better representative of theirs whom we knew than Lala Sham Lal. — Our struggle had come to an end, even when we were in the best of our spirits and could conceive of no weakening in our resolve. We had, in our hearts, resented his interference, but could go no further than that. We had to listen to his arguments and be persuaded by him. What an influence the great loving soul could exert over us!

Had I acted reasonably like a normal being during all the phases of this struggle? Indeed not! The oppressive atmosphere of the prison, charged with the filth of centuries, and the suffocating fumes of age-long suffering that emanated from human hearts, had gradually infiltrated into our beings. The environment around us was beset with difficulties, problems and obstacles, which are no concern of a life normally lived in freedom. The necessity of breaking loose from unbearable restrictions was brought home to us at every step. An inhuman effort and an inhuman energy were necessitated by the urge to live, to survive, to reach the greater field of activity outside the pale of our hand-and-foot-bound prison world.

In the circumstances I could not but be conscious of a class-war going on between the prisoners and their custodians. At night while we slept the warder called us many times to make sure of our being alive. They counted us morning and evening like cattle and we felt bitter. They searched us and we felt more bitter. The thud and thump of their boots and feet on the path outside our cells was anathema to us. But they were doing their duty. And so were the officers when they opposed every rightful demand, every effort for improving our diet and conditions. It was what the Government expected from them. We began to feel the need for a struggle, much like the need for air and water. The class conflict had made our being synonymous with fighting.

There were the memories of past conflicts in which we had taken part and there were the stories about the part that others

had played. It was the inheritance of the historical struggle bequeathed to us. A prisoner, for example, was beaten to death ; another was a malingerer who produced a sore in his leg, in order to avoid hard labour, but the Superintendent-cum-medical officer of the jail cut off his leg ; another put some offensive thing into his eyes to obtain a few days' relief from work and one of his eyes was taken out. There were also the stories of the prisoners' attempts to assault jail officers, to cut the nose of one, to attack another with a brickbat, and so on. Every prisoner coming from or going to another jail knew the harrowing details of some inhuman treatment, which he would relate to his fellow prisoners. The tales and descriptions of alleged incidents, true or false, carried conviction with the prisoners, because it is most difficult for a prisoner to disbelieve them. Gossip is, in the circumstances, mixed with truth, and reality diluted with exaggeration ; but the " C " class prisoners' horrible plight inevitably creates bitter struggles.

We, the " terrorist " and " dangerous " prisoners, had never resorted to violence as a measure or counter-measure against jail officers. Our weapons, in all the fights, had been boycott, non-co-operation, work-strike, hunger-strike, and disobedience of jail regulations ; we had become conscious of the advantages as well as the drawbacks and limitations of a violent struggle. Never did we feel helpless and hedged in while launching a non-violent struggle, because of the ease with which we could come to decisions. Experience had taught us that the form of struggle we resorted to, best suited our situation. Violence, on the other hand, was something hidden in the recesses of our hearts, like a suppressed and primitive thing. An individual was sometimes provoked, but the society checked his instinctive outburst. We frequently consulted one another as we always preferred to take joint steps and act in unison. That was how " violence " was turned into an unnecessary weapon.

Terrorism was an individual method of approach to social political problems. It could never envelop the larger issues before the country. It had limited us in the past, but we were able to free ourselves from its narrowing influence and embrace the wider, broader, and universally applicable ideal of socialism. How could we go to the masses preaching terrorism and what difficulty of theirs could we solve with its aid?

We had come back to the Terrorist Ward ; and I gave my full attention to the study of the method and principles of socialism. It was a renewed attempt on my part to find out the best ways

of resolving the age-long conflict in its limited as well as its wider aspect. The hunger-strike had made me conscious of our limitations and it was imperative to think of our problems in the light of the larger struggle of the masses of our country.

The repercussions on the physical side were naturally not healthy. We had been careless enough to disregard the laws of our physiological nature. As a result I had had a severe attack of piles during the latter half of the hunger-strike and the trouble seemed to persist. Pandit Rupchand's health had badly suffered and he was never able to be wholly free from the after-effects of the past. The most unfortunate case was that of Pandit Inderpal who had a sensationless patch on his right thigh, which subsequently developed into paralysis of the right side.

The Babar Akalis were released one by one. The comrades with short sentences too had gone. Those belonging to the United Provinces and Bihar had been transferred to their respective provinces. The Madras prisoners were set free by their ministry. Pandit Inderpal, Malik Nathu Ram, and other old companions of ours, who had been previously transferred to Montgomery Jail, had come back.

It was here that Pandit Inderpal one day fell a victim to a stroke of paralysis. The doctors said that it was a case of a nerve lesion in the brain. The Pandit had been complaining of the sensationless patch, but the medical officer had paid no attention to it. He was now no longer able to move. Only nine or ten of us were left in the ward. The Pandit needed day and night attendance and we all took our duty beside his bed by turns. He was examined by a specialist from the Mayo Hospital. After some days a medical board came to examine him and report about his condition. The Superintendent had recommended his release. Friends outside were also trying to secure his release, which was ordered in the first week of January, 1938. It was a great relief to all of us.

A few days later Mr. Jahangiri Lal, our comrade who had no legs, was released on compassionate grounds, largely due to the untiring efforts of Sirdar Pratap Singh, M.L.A., and the leader of the Opposition Party in the Provincial Assembly, Dr. Gopichand Bhargava.

Another friend, comrade Girdhari Lal of the Amritsar Revolver Case, joined us in the Terrorist Ward. Malik Nathu Ram, our old comrade who was still serving his sentence of seven years, was transferred from Montgomery Jail to Lahore. He too, along with others, had been on hunger-strike there. He and I were placed in

the "B" class through Lala Sham Lal's personal influence with the Minister for Jails. We were overjoyed to have Malik Nathu Ram again amongst us. He looked rather pulled down because of the persisting after-effects of the hunger-strike. Swami Hans Raj was also later on classified as a better-class prisoner.

Girdhari Lal was a young snub-nosed comrade with broad, frank, and familiar features, a jolly expression always animating his face. He knew the art of measuring by yards where inches were the rule. We had our own kitchen now and managed it by turns. Where seven tumblers of *Lassi* were required, Girdhari Lal was most likely to prepare twenty. We ran after him or he ran before us after such exploits; but a prodigal like him had nothing more than boisterous merriment to offer in response to the corrective measures of the rest. The days of his management of the kitchen took us through many a vicissitude of fortune. He was generous of heart, overgenerous of friendship, and master of not a few of those boons of bountiful Nature which add charm to the human personality.

Malik Nathu Ram, cheerful in spite of his failing health, made his company most precious to us by his neat, calm, and careful habits. The five years of his separation from us had effected many a pleasant change in his emotionally high-strung nature. We saw that, as he had become more aged he had also become more gentle and considerate.

Girdhari Lal parted from us within a few months when his release came through. We, the lifers, were like boatmen who had ferried scores of people across the river and now found our boat stuck in the mud of the bank. Only five of us were left now. The days of big meetings, large gatherings, festivities, struggles on a mass scale, inspiring poetical symposiums, and imposing literary discourses were no more. Our small garden, the result of years of sweating toil, was nourished in token of a happy life lived together in the past. Our diminished society left us calm, contemplative, and peace-loving; and increased our introspective tendencies. We, the remaining five, were all in a better class, enjoying facilities for reading, indoor and outdoor games, which were denied to us in the "C" class. We, however, could not avail ourselves of the latter facility and repeatedly requested the Superintendent to allow us to play volley-ball outside our ward with non-political "B" class prisoners; but the segregation orders stood in his way and he refused. But, at last, he permitted some "B" class prisoners to come and play in our ward. Now we had the chance to associate with non-terrorist

prisoners ; at last, the barriers had, to certain extent, been broken. Every day we spent an hour and a half in sport and felt the refreshing effect of new social ties.

CHAPTER 13

LALAJI PASSES AWAY

I WAS permitted to have books from an outside library and became a member of the Punjab Public Library. We had also been allowed the daily *Tribune*, another contribution to the limited interests of our monotonous life. Our life began to follow the pattern of the days spent by four of us in a portion of Ward No. 14 Old, with some outward, superficial improvement. About seven years of exclusive association with prisoners of our own category had made us accustomed to a secluded and circumscribed way of living. Our contribution to the common effort for the amelioration of the ordinary prisoner's lot was negligible. Because of our segregation from them, all our struggles had been without any direct reference to the conditions under which they lived. But naturally with the passage of time, some improvements for the common benefit of prisoners had in fact taken place. Our sympathisers and friends outside were still continuing their efforts for our release ; but the prospects were not favourable because of persistent rumours about the imminence of another great war. On the first day of September, 1939, came the news of the German declaration of war on Poland. All the world was to plunge into this unprecedented holocaust.

"What about India?" was the first question that came into my mind. I thought of her forced participation in the war, of the vain sacrifice of lakhs of our countrymen, and of the new promises to her that would be subsequently broken. Here was also the opportunity for exerting greater pressure on Britain to loosen her hold on our country ; but naturally pessimistic, as a long-term prisoner is, I saw an era of uncalled-for misery and untold privations for our countrymen, compensated by no substantial advancement in our status during the war.

There had come, with the acceptance of office by the Congress,

an 'unwonted vigour into the politics of our country. The ministries had embarked upon various programmes for the welfare of the masses. People had begun to express their views more openly, as the popular ministries were in no mood to suppress civil liberties. Police administration was subjected to bold criticism everywhere. The country was not agreeable to fighting an imperialist war for the benefit of Britain. Britain would have to agree to the principle of our independence. But war was declared on our behalf without even consulting the Central Legislature. The Congress was prepared to pledge its support to the common cause of freedom from aggression for all countries if effective powers were placed in the hands of representatives of the Indian people. The Congress ministries had to vacate office because the British Government was not willing to part with power, and thus a constitutional deadlock was created in the country that could be solved only with the formation of a national government in the Centre with chosen representatives of the people as its members. The reign of special powers and ordinances and mass arrests began; and the public workers who had been hardly out of jail found themselves behind bars again.

On the 6th of January, 1940 came the sad news of Lala Sham Lal's death from heart failure. I felt as though our link with the outer world had suddenly received a cruel blow and snapped. He was in reality what the world beyond the prison could be for us. His love, his sympathy, his desire to see us free, and his care for us as if we were his children, were emblematic of the attitude towards us of the patriotic masses of our country. As a prisoner who is by virtue of circumstances more impressionable, I knew what a light of love he had shed over us.

Society at large is run on a reciprocal basis. Give and take is the law that prevails. But what can a prisoner do but demand help, care, and sympathy from his friends and relatives? He has only this one-sided and beggarly attitude to offer, unless he is conscientious and self-centred enough to remain aloof and deliberately limit himself within the protective armour of his own self. Unbroken relationship in society requires the fulfilment of certain obligations, the foremost being that of continuous response. But Lalaji thought of no such conditions for us. He even went to the extent of sacrificing his life in the cause of the political workers and prisoners. The defence of our case for more than three years had overtaxed his energies and ruined his health. He had been defending the cases of poor Congress workers who

could not afford to pay for a good lawyer and he had always overworked himself. His association with us for the past nine years had been a gradual unfolding of the greatness of his heart—and now, to our dismay, the chapter of his life was closed.

I felt as though I had come to a dark path! The richness of his nature that devolved upon us like a shaft of beaming rays, even in the depths of imprisoned life, had suddenly stopped in its flow. I was confused! The tragedy of his death reflected upon my consciousness again and again. I needed the influence of this great man, as I needed freedom and life. A merging with him would have been the ideal course for the poor entity that was I. Little ambitions and small necessities of my heart had always been in subjective association with him. A prisoner like me could never be big enough to hold more than faint glimmerings and moderate pre-conceptions about the uncertain future. His generosity, on the other hand, had the loud call of a flood, which could lave hearts and energise souls. "Live, live to see the freedom of the country," had been the cry of my soul for him, because his life was a necessity overriding all other necessities felt by me.

He represented an ideology different from mine. He had all his life struggled and fought for the sake of our country in his own way—Gandhiji's way. I had seen him deal with the police, the judges, and us his terrorist clients; and never failed to observe the underlying humanity in all his dealings.

He believed in effecting a change of heart in the British ruling class through the practice of non-violence and truth, and could even credit them with a genuine desire for the betterment of our conditions. It was natural that there should have been differences of opinion with him; but was there any ground for differing from his all-embracing humanity, the noble impulses of his heart and his spirit of understanding and toleration? Could the irradiation of his soul be denied? Never could I be happy and exultant over the generation of heat and the creation of bitterness, which had been the case in not a few out of many struggles in jail in which I had participated. The hatred that had burnt in me had left me weaker in spite of an apparent success in a clash. There were also the occasions on which cool-headed conduct and not emotion had brought peace to us. The human problem of improving relations with fellow human beings who came in contact with us was expected to be solved, and not confused, by unthinking and prejudiced behaviour.

Lalaji's influence was more precious to me now that he was no more ; and I had an inner urge to tally my spirit with his, and to imbibe as much of his waning light as I was capable of.

He was continuously in my memory for many days and nights. Had I been free I would in all probability have been excessively grieved over his death for a day or two and then reverted to the normal activities of life. Here it was no exceeding pain, but a pervasive sorrow, resembling love gently felt and carefully nourished. He was to me like a revolutionary dying in an armed conflict with the enemies of our freedom. His life seemed to be a long preparation for this final step. How could he be so at one in his heart with scores of revolutionaries who had believed in nothing but a blow for a blow and blood for blood?

Now that he had gone, I wished to be possessed of his vision along with the revolutionary fervour that should be the equipment of all who serve the cause of the country.

He had died earlier than I and had thus raised himself infinitely higher than any heights of sacrifice to which I, the still living, could ever aspire. The living do such things, but they can never reach the heights of those who have already succeeded in offering their last drop of blood for a noble cause.

I wondered how he was so simple and so pure, and yet so wise and so great! I sought more light on the truths of his life, and more insight into the workings of his richly endowed mind. It was the end of an old and the beginning of a new chapter in my life.

CHAPTER 14

KHAKSARS

THE Punjab Government had embarked upon a policy of wholesale arrests, and many a radical worker, especially the old terrorist, was already in prison. The war against the Nazis had in our country been turned by our imperialist masters into a war against the forces of nationalism. Our old friends, Mr. Tika Ram Sukhan, Mr. Dhanwantari, Tehl Singh, and others had come

this time as security prisoners to be detained till the end of the war. They had brought startling news of seething discontent in the country. Their hearts were full of hopes for a better future tending to break the crust of our pessimism. They were transferred to other jails within a short period.

The Government ban on all sorts of military drill and wearing of military uniforms by volunteers of public bodies, brought the Government in conflict with the Khaksars, an organisation under the leadership of Allama Mashriqi, an intellectual. The Khaksars mustered strong in the city of Lahore with a view to breaking the ban. On the 23rd of March, a procession of their volunteers was taken out in uniform and with "*Belchas*," the emblem of their organisation, signifying social service. The police challenged them and a clash ensued, many Khaksars being killed in the encounter. The Khaksars had met the challenge of the police with their "*Belchas*" and a high police officer was killed and some others of the force wounded. Several hundred Khaksars were arrested in this connection.

Respectable middle-class citizens, mainly shopkeepers, suspected of sympathising with the Khaksars, were rounded up and detained under Section 129 of the Defence of India Rules. Twenty-two of them were kept in our ward. One of their *Salars* was detained under Section 26 of the D.I.R. We were glad to avail ourselves of the company of these Muslim citizens of Lahore, the majority of whom were educated young men who became very friendly with us within a few days.

We wished to talk with them upon the usual topic of the independence of our country. They listened to what we said; but it was a great disappointment to learn that they had no interest in politics. They would neither argue nor discuss political issues. Their approach towards secular problems was fundamentally religious. All of them offered *Namaz* together and listened to the after-prayer preaching of a *Moulvi* who was a member of their group. They became more and more friendly when they knew that we respected their religious sentiments and were yearning for fresh society in this lonely ward of the prison.

We talked with some of the young Khaksars about socialism, about the incompatibility of Islam with the slavery that was the lot of our countrymen, and impressed upon them the necessity of thinking about the ways and means of obtaining the freedom of our vast sub-continent. They would neither corroborate nor

contradict us on any point, but they were nevertheless sympathetic to our aspirations about the future of our country. After a few days their *Salar* became suspicious of their indulging in political discussion and ordered them to refrain from doing that. As a result we lost all hopes of converting them to the nationalistic side. We however got great response from them as far as social relations were concerned.

They were a care-free and happy lot and the poets among them recited poems, and singers sang songs. Their bustling activity bore a gladdening influence, our yearning for which activity was patent.

What did Khaksarism mean? Theocracy? Pan-Islamism or what else? No one could enlighten us on this point. Even the *Salar* of the Khaksars could tell us nothing about the ultimate object of their movement. Professedly, they were not communal. Evidently they were conscious of no clear-cut political goal. They were all soldiers, they said, knowing only to follow their leader, the Allama, without any questioning. They had suffered greatly and bravely in the recent clash with the police, and though they had shown a religious fortitude, a religious aim was still nowhere to be discerned.

I felt as if the majority of the Muslims of the country had the same semi-conscious, vaguely political and fundamentally religious attitude towards the problems facing our country. It was also the case with Hindus but to a lesser extent. Politics was the need of the hour, a means towards deliverance for the subjugated people of our country. Being indifferent and vague towards it meant being careless about our freedom, and our future. The ban of the *Salar* was wholly unjustified, but we did not raise our voice against it, for the sake of amiable relations and peace.

They too had begun to feel the stress of want, the denial of ordinary articles of daily use to them, such as ghee, milk, tobacco, and writing materials. They tried the method of the prisoners and got some facilities.

One of them, a pahlwan, was too fat to offer *Namaz*. Nature had compensated him with a pleasant and care-free disposition. When a companion of his would chide him for his non-observance of daily *Namaz*, he would declare with a smile, "I am like these terrorists. Count me as one of them in the matter of *Namaz*!"

"Your path is right; I am with you!" he would good-

naturedly tell us without feeling any encumbering necessity of looking into the meaning of his words. He was a mine of pleasantries and cheerful encouragements.

One day some of his companions spread the rumour that many release orders had been issued. A false chit was handed to him in the afternoon, asking him along with two others to come to the jail gate for release. He gathered his belongings, distributed in joy the stock of his tobacco, sugar, etc., to the prisoners doing menial work in the ward and stood smiling with satisfaction at the gate of our ward to bid farewell to the remaining associates. He was then told that it was all a joke.

"Never mind!" he said complaisantly without showing any signs of exasperation, adding, "It is good even to be released in joke!"

They were all in fact released after a few days. They continued to remember us through letters for more than six months and then the law of reciprocal relationship asserted itself to our disadvantage.

CHAPTER 15

THE BOAT IS FILLED AGAIN

OUR society had again shrunk to five. I felt as though nothing changed in this world. Our environment suffers from no ups and downs and contains us for all time. The good and bad, the joy and sorrow of every happening, every external condition glides past us, only touching the skin. A hard crust has formed inside and has disconnected itself with all emotion, all tender feeling. A division of our personality has taken place. One is approachable and reacts to influences, the other, the more intimate one, is detached and uncommunicative. It has created a yearning for tumultuous joys and sufferings and upheavals of the soul. It has only seen the symbol of tyranny of man over man, a cage, and only knows to play the primitive role of reacting to painful obstacles, hatred, anger, and violence. It looks around with suspicion, senses danger and sends forth a fighting cry. The other part of our personality has acquired patience, toleration

and forgiveness. Its position is not very strong, its expressions not very lucid. Men come and go without subtracting from or adding to our life. It is at a standstill. We are never melancholy, never sad, but we have lost much of the stormy side of our joys and comforts. The insidious atmosphere of jail is having its effect. That is why we yearn for more company, for fresh visitors to our habitation, and new influences to cope with.

Our mutual relations are ideal. We criticise no one, find no faults with one another and only help, encourage and appreciate. We are closely knit together like one man, but this does not mean that we are without any fault. Suffering, struggling, eating, walking, working and talking together for years and years has given us an unnatural, unnaturally bound-up-together character. We can nourish no grievance and bear no ill-will against one another. There is the consciousness of the ever present need of fighting together. No one objects if another has even caused an unnecessary quarrel with a jail employee. Everyone has a distinct personality that merges in its own way into that of the whole group.

Energetic Malik Kundan Lal was a man of broad features, great friendships, far-fetched schemes and uncontrollable emotions, but here he had found less and less scope for his energies and yielded to the inevitable pacifism that is the ultimate role of a prisoner.

Swami Hans Raj, calm and deliberate, slow and steady, was the exact opposite of Malik Kundan Lal. He counterbalanced the hasty trustfulness of the Malik with his sound judgment not unconnected with an innate scepticism. He had the natural disposition of a builder who gets together helping hands by dint of his amiable qualities and goes towards the completion of his constructive plan. But here he could put his industrious and persevering though not revolutionary qualities to little use.

Pandit Kishori Lal, the man of strong conviction, unflinching resolution and unswerving ideals, had great capacity to adapt though little capacity to change. Neither money, favour, nor consideration of any selfish gain could make any impression upon him. He could not be softened by any facility or privilege, or a good turn by an officer of the jail. He held his own emotions in check and would not be touched by those of another. But this was his inner self; the mainspring of his outer qualities of sociability, strong prejudices, stood between him and the world that did not conform to his ideas. He would simply ignore an opinion or view opposite to his. He was by no means so serious-looking

a man as the traits of his character would imply. Frequent, explosive laughter was a special feature of his carefree, consistent frame of mind. He was the jolliest of all. One of his hobbies was pigeons kept in a corner of the ward, and he was happy to see them fly.

Pandit Rupchand, with emotion as his guiding star, inclined to be meticulous in distinguishing between good and bad, noble and mean, had been living more in the world of moonshine and poetry than in that of reality. A book could make an altogether different being out of him for days, even months. He had his saving side in his taste for scientific books. His special interests in psychology and biology, and books on other scientific knowledge had exerted a steadying influence upon him and given a rational basis to his thoughts. He always required an excellent book to brighten him up, and otherwise remained dull and uncommunicative even to the point of being dubbed unsocial. His natural pessimism gave him a discerning objectivity about things, but to be always a hard realist was not in his line. His interest in literature had become exclusive, and that too, limited to a few authors, such as Tagore, Romain Rolland and Bernard Shaw, and so had his tastes for persons, things, even eatables. He had limited himself of his own free will and was therefore always in need for expansion. The jail atmosphere was suiting him less and less and he had acquired the defensive armour of indifference and disinterestedness to an extraordinary degree. He had even given up writing poetry and was nowadays occupied in books on dietetics and health as his trouble of indigestion had increased. He had given up rearing pets such as birds and squirrels, because they died at one time or another and made him sad.

They had all grown weary of the system of managing our kitchen by turns and I was left in permanent charge of it. Gardening had become a hobby with me. Harmonious relations among ourselves and between us and those who came to keep us company for a limited period, was a favourite ideal before me. I had natural aspirations towards managing things on a large scale. Fruit growing, agriculture and vegetable growing had lately become my favourite subjects and I was reading books about these.

At times we sat together like boatmen, waiting with our empty boat, and talked about past events and the friends connected with them. Our memories quickened but they seldom went beyond the days of our coming into the prison. We felt as if we had

always been here. Even the dreams about the outside world had left us. There was no regret for the time spent nor was the heaviness of the long imprisonment weighing upon our minds, because the past is always the past however pleasant or unpleasant it may have been. But we thought about the future and the experiences that were yet to come. The indefinite period of our sentence conditioned our wanderings into the future. Our release, uncertain as death, was never an immediate consideration before us, but the end of the War was the tentative end that we had fixed for our imprisonment. It was likely that we would get our freedom when the agony of the world would cease.

The Government had become panicky after the fall of France. Wholesale arrests all over the country were the result. More Socialist and Communist workers were sent to prison. Amongst hundreds of others, my brother S. Amrik Singh was arrested in the United Provinces, and confined as a security prisoner. In our province six members of the Legislative Assembly were arrested on a single day. The arrested persons were being kept in various jails of the province.

To our ward came first of all Mr. Daniyal Latifi, Barrister, the son of a prominent I.C.S. officer, who had held the post of a financial commissioner. He was charged with pasting red posters on the walls or somewhere in the city. He was an impressive young man, Communist by conviction, with new ideas and a strikingly new mode of living.

"I have arranged for tea-making machinery," he informed us one day. The machinery arrived and we were curious to see how it worked. We had accepted his invitation to tea and went to his cell at the appointed time.

There was an ordinary kettle with a tea-set on the table and Mr. Daniyal began to work at his "machinery" without manifesting any exceptional skill in mechanics. His touch was nevertheless gentle, and his way of handling things easy. His towel was a machinery for wiping hands; his teaspoon a machinery for lifting tea towards the mouth, and his sugar-pot the machinery for holding the sweet substance. Everything subject to the laws of motion was machinery no doubt, but no machine could be cultured and civilised as Mr. Daniyal was.

We eagerly listened to what he told us about his life during his stay in England. His talk was very interesting when he was in a communicative mood.

Our ranks were swelling. Within a few days arrived Sirdar

Gopal Singh Qaumi, a well-known figure in the Punjab Congress circles. So far we had known him only by name. Possessed of a contagious frankness and familiarity, he befriended us on the very first day of his arrival. Within a few days a *Mouji* Club as well as a committee — later on called "Soviet" — for conducting our day-to-day affairs was shaped into being at his suggestion, and he was elected as president of both. He had the natural capacity to take the leadership of all of us. The *Mouji* Club's programme was frivolity and lightheartedness; we were to make as much noise as we wished and laugh as much as we could. Any serious talk was taboo.

Another addition to our society was Lala Karam Chand, Editor of the weekly *Paras*. The charge against him was that he had published a sensational poster giving the news of Mr. Churchill's arrest (which event in fact had taken place during the Boer War), with false implications.

At the jail gate he was ordered to be taken to the Terrorist Ward (also called Bomb Case Ward).

Lalaji objected to being taken there. He was an old Congressman who had always been against bomb-outrages by revolutionaries and felt he would be in quite an embarrassing position in the society of such people. Their ward too had taken a name after them which was terrifying. The officer concerned taking Lalaji for a conscientious objector suggested the *Siyasat Khana*. This name was appealing and Lalaji agreed to be taken there. He passed the night in a cell in the *Siyasat Khana*, which was nothing but an enclosure of a hundred punitive cells. He was not very comfortable there but had at least the satisfaction of not being locked up in the dangerous bomb-case ward.

In the morning Qaumiji met him and brought him along to see our place. He took a cursory view of our vegetable garden and fruit trees and smiled. He then inspected one of the cells and told us they were much better than those of the *Siyasat Khana*, which name was nothing but a snare. The word "*siyasat*" means politics as well as grinding stones.

"Oh! Oh! we politically minded people should always guard against falling into the trap of well-meaning words," exclaimed Lalaji and added, "Dirty mud walls, no light at all, and grinding-stones without anything to grind, sum up my politics of the last night!"

He obtained the necessary permission to join us the very same day. He was an elderly, calm and quiet person, very sympa-

thetic towards us. For the few days that he was with us, he observed our habits, our way of living and studied our characters. He said nothing much to us even on the day of his release. But he never forgot us. An occasional interview or a gift in the form of a book or two, or some magazines and periodicals now and then sent by him to us were proofs of his kindly attitude towards us. He published a series of articles in his paper relating his recent impressions about the jail. Those articles were remarkable for his insight into the psychology of the prisoners, with whom he had had but a limited association for a few days.

CHAPTER 16

RED ARMY

QAUMIJI was our undisputed leader. His being amongst us was sufficient to change the atmosphere around us. Energetic and vivacious as he was he had brought new life to us. He too was happy as he himself merrily declared one day, "A leadership without pin-pricks and biting criticism I enjoy here is worth having, however limited its scope may be."

"We bet, your followers shall increase day by day," remarked Pandit Kishori Lal, not without facts on his side. New arrests were being made. New people were joining us almost every day.

The Superintendent, a new man who had recently taken charge, provided us with the company of a non-political "B" class prisoner. The latter was creating much trouble in his own ward and in addition to being an informer against his own associates was possessed of a bellicose spirit of no small achievement to his credit. The prisoners in the "B" class ward were happy to get rid of him. We were not in an inhospitable mood and let him remain as he liked. We were conscious of not giving him any chance to form an impression that he was considered an undesirable element in our society. But he was of too proud a nature to suffer silently the insult his associates had caused by turning him out of their ward. He told us that he wanted to go back.

The Superintendent came on parade and Malik Kundan Lal told him that the "B" class prisoner wanted to go back.

"It is no concern of yours," admonished the Superintendent sternly.

Malik Kundan Lal, nettled at this uncalled for rebuke, told the Superintendent that he was within his rights in voicing the "B" class prisoners' demand which was also the demand of all others confined in the Terrorist Ward.

"Shut up!" shouted the Superintendent angrily.

"I am not used to such threatening language," retorted the Malik.

"Take him to the punitive cells," ordered the Superintendent and then stepped forward to inspect other cells. He reached Qaumiji who had heard everything while standing in the verandah of his cell.

"You shall send not only Malik Kundan Lal but all of us to the cells because we all repeat what he has said to you!"

These words firmly spoken by Qaumiji made the Superintendent reflect for a moment. Qaumiji moreover informed him that we all demanded the turning out of the new-comer, though we had not had the slightest idea of doing so before.

The Superintendent was too angry to give any reply and moved towards other cells without even stopping to question the authority of Qaumiji for speaking on behalf of all. The Deputy Superintendent remained behind to "pacify" Qaumiji. He said he would set matters right and give immediate orders for the Malik's being brought back from the cells.

"Why is the Superintendent so haughty?" inquired Qaumiji with righteous indignation.

"You should treat the matter as a test of your patience," pleaded the Deputy, knowing full well the results of prolonging a quarrel in which the jail authorities were wholly in the wrong. He waited for the Superintendent to go out of the ward and then gave orders for bringing back Malik Kundan Lal and sending out the "B" class prisoner. The latter was glad to return, a thing that could not have happened but for our forceful backing. The Superintendent had in reality tried, as every new-coming officer does, to intimidate us if he could. We, the old prisoners, had many such experiences but never an advocate of such a personality and calibre as Qaumiji was.

There was in the outside world great resentment against Government suppression of public opinion and civil liberties. The Communist workers who had joined us expected a widespread struggle to be launched by the All-India Congress Committee.

They vehemently criticised the Congress decision to start the token movement of "Individual Satyagraha" limited to specially selected persons for the purpose. The Communists declared it was merely sabotaging the mass movement for which there was great enthusiasm in the country.

On the 30th of November 1940, Mian Iftikharuddin, the first Satyagrahi in our province, the President of the P.P.C.C., was arrested. The youthful President had been very sympathetic towards the political prisoners' cause and had issued several press statements in our favour in the days of the 1938 hunger-strike. It was a pleasant surprise to have him amongst us.

In the morning Dr. Gopi Chand Bhargava, leader of the Opposition party in the Provincial Assembly, joined us. He had been taken into custody under Rule 26, D.I.R. Doctor Sahib's name was closely associated with the terrorist prisoners as he had from time to time come to their aid during the trials of their cases in courts and their subsequent struggles in jails, especially in the various hunger-strikes they had gone through for improving their lot, and it was a matter of deep gratification to have him as a member of our society here.

Sirdar Partap Singh, General Secretary of the P.P.C.C., joined us a few days later. Pandit Neki Ram Sharma and L. Bhim Sen Sachar, M.L.A., came when our ward was packed to the full and it was decided to turn our working-shed into a dwelling place for further arrivals. The influx of people continued and each cell was occupied by more than one and in some cases three or four together. The cream of the nationalist circles of the province was here. Mr. Rajbans and the two brothers, comrades Mahmud and Mazhar, the student leaders of the city, and Mr. Panna Lal Aggarwal, a Satyagrahi from Lahore, were later additions to our society. The accommodation problem became acute but we were too happy to think of such difficulties. What a grand society we had! We felt buoyed up and lifted to heights of cheerfulness. Our old unchanging world was wholly revolutionised. The old boatmen found themselves midstream vigorously plying their oars because a new life had come to lighten their hearts and brighten their outlook.

The organisation was renamed "Soviet" and its work given a broader basis. It was really amusing to find many new-comers recruited into the smaller but more busy and more clamorous organisation, the *Mouji* Club. A special feature of it was that those who did not join it were not less sympathetic towards

its aims and objects. A Red Army had come into being due to the efforts of Mr. Daniyal and held its daily parades, in view of its having no bigger functions to perform. One day it raided the "house" of Pandit Neki Ram Sharma and confiscated a part of his property (eatables) on the ground of his absenting himself from the weekly meeting of the Soviet without any plausible excuse. It had really found some useful activity for itself and was enhancing its prestige day by day. An exercise party was organised under the aegis of the Red Army to keep its members in a state of fitness and health. Qaumiji, the president of both the organisations, had now a greater burden on his shoulders.

Lala Bhim Sen Sachar was given a separate cell, as a special case. He was a very impressive personality, with regular non-interfering habits. He would himself see to the cleanliness of his cell, dust even the iron bars of the doors with his own hands, and spin, exercise and pray with enviable regularity. He was greatly interested in garden work and we both occupied ourselves in it from eight to nine in the morning every day. We talked as we worked and I was much impressed by his way of thinking. He would always try to understand another's point of view and never enforce his own. He had a simple way of tackling complicated problems of life.

Our interest had been largely transferred from books to men and from jail politics to the politics of the outside world. Here were patriotic men belonging to different faiths, ideologies and creeds, all united in the common struggle for the country's freedom. They held discussions on political issues, on their future programmes and mutual understandings about how best to help one another. They might have had differences of the past to bridge over but we five who had not all these considerations before us mainly wished to benefit by their society. Pandit Rupchand, Malik Kundan Lal and I believed in Socialism but it was not advisable to declare our adherence to any party. Pandit Kishori Lal and Swami Hans Raj were definitely inclined towards the Communist Party, but they too tried to behave as non-party-men without any prejudice against followers of other parties.

I was strongly of the opinion that there should be no parties in the jail. The prisoners should be treated all alike. Sachar Sahib's social demeanour was an ideal before me. He always looked to me irreproachable and faultless. Our social life went on smoothly to the complete forgetfulness of the hampering influence of prison conditions.

CHAPTER 17

QAUMIJI LOSES HIS SHOES

SIRDAR PARTAP SINGH, M.L.A., had come from Amritsar Jail. In a few days he understood us more than we did ourselves. His observations and remarks were expressive of an uncommonly keen interest in men and their affairs. He talked from his heart and came nearer and nearer to us till we felt there was no difference between him and us. He possessed sympathy, the first condition of wisdom. He exerted great influence on us through the magic of unburdened, clear thought. A double M.A., well-read, with a wealth of well-trimmed well-digested ideas, he had the art of talking about serious things in the setting of a general and instructive atmosphere created by himself.

He preferred the company of modest, poor workers to that of the rich and influential ones. His words carried the warmth, affection and the richness of his smooth, smiling nature. His criticism bore the quality of enlightenment. His social life was an unconscious art and the subject matter of that art always looked resilient in his hands.

I could talk with him on any subject, any matter of interest ranging from important political issues or literary topics, to the small matters of ordinary human conduct. It is difficult to find such an all-understanding friend even in the outside world, but we had him in the jail.

There were now more than sufficient players for outdoor games. Volley-ball was played outside our ward, for lack of space inside. We, the old prisoners, for the first time saw what the place around our ward looked like. Beyond the *Siyasat Khana* was the jail garden and water reservoir. One day we went in the company of some Congress leaders to the water tank and climbed upstairs to its roof and looked at the people gathered on the race-course maidan and on the road passing by. It was a novel experience and had a wondrous effect upon us. The distance between the free and the imprisoned world was only a few hundred yards, and queerly enough the air was the same but not those who breathed it. Seeing for long struck me as not a rational thing and I came down with my eyes still retaining the impression of a broad, limitless view.

Raizada Hans Raj, the veteran Congress leader of the province, was more than seventy but he too had offered *satyagraha* and come to the jail. He still had enough of the spirit of the young and could crack a joke with any of the young men present here. He worked at the spinning wheel, took part in the activities of the *Mouji* Club, and showed a lively interest in the meetings of the Soviet. He was suffering from diabetes and heart trouble and had to be sent to Mayo Hospital for diagnosis and treatment.

Qaumiji's new country-made shoes had arrived more than a month before. He would put his feet in the new pair while going to the jail gate for an interview and take it off on his return automatically as he would change into his usual clothes, a shirt and a *Kachha* ordinarily worn in the ward. He would then come out of his cell smiling or laughing, his dilapidated and outworn shoes slipping at ease beneath his feet and giving out short creaking sounds.

Another month or so passed and the new shoes too began to show signs of aging but it seemed Qaumiji had no idea of the aging process of things in his possession. A goodnatured smile or a frank laugh was sure to greet you if you passed by him or observed him from a distance. He was fond of sugar and gur. Anyone living in the ward could not fail to see sometime in the day his venerable figure bent over a small bag of gur or a smaller one but more evenly filled with sugar, helping himself to a handful. He was suffering from diabetes but that did not mean to him a call for renunciation of agreeable things. When one or two prison-mates entered his cell he would offer a lump of the sweet stuff, but when a large number got in, he would naturally feel somewhat uneasy at the robber-like intentions writ large upon their faces and deceptive words of beggary on their lips. He however did not know how to hide his sweet things from others. What was in his cell could always be seen at a glance. It was candid like himself.

In a similar way, he could not hold back the expression of his desire for leadership, for a vast multitude of faithful followers spread over the whole of the country, for joy, for pleasure. Desires oozed out of his heart in a serene, sparkling, bubbling flow.

Qaumiji was evidently gifted with an extraordinary capacity for a successful compromise between extremes. His uncommon expressiveness, his unusual oratorical powers and the exceptional friendliness of his spirit were due to that. Not only men but

things too received a share of his sympathy, that is why he did not know what to do one morning when he found his old shoes missing. He searched for them till noon but in vain. Friends had come to him with valuable suggestions and clues as to the probable culprit who had stolen and thrown away the shoes but all amounted naturally to the creation of an atmosphere of hilarity and jokes and the real issue remained confused.

I saw him sitting in his cell in a somewhat resigned but in no way melancholy mood weaving a thread of intimate thoughts in his mind.

The disappearance of the pair of shoes was a *fait accompli*. The idea that the thing was gone forever must have made him somewhat philosophical as was evident from a shrewd, jocular expression on his face, as he looked at me.

I on my part compared his thoughts with mine expressed in the following question that rose in my mind. "Why did he not himself throw away the shoes and why was another's help necessary to relieve him of the worthless object?"

My studied silence was however accentuated by a broad grin. I let him review undisturbed the whole situation to his heart's content by walking away from his side and going out of the ward for a walk on the road in front of it.

The sugar that Qaumiji ate was shared by others but the shoes were only his under his exclusive patronage especially in their tattered old age. In laying stress upon our relations with living things we are always prone to forget the importance of inanimate objects which serve us. The sense of security, faithfulness and comfort borne by them is lost upon us. Perhaps Qaumiji was thinking of this aspect of the question. Probably he remembered the day when he had first used the shoes. There was the gold work above the toe and the leather was pleasantly coloured and soft. These shoes had a short history and a long period of use. They had been previously hidden many times and then restored to Qaumiji. Many a night he had awakened from sleep and found his feet searching in vain for their covering. Once they were a tight fit, then they had become comfortably adapted to his feet. They had been lately demanding a helping effort on his part to enable them to keep company with him for use while going to and coming from the bathroom. He at last could not have taken them outside on his release in memory of his prison days because his children would surely have thrown them away.

Coming back into the ward I saw that the topic had not

exhausted itself. Qaumiji was examining and cross-examining some suspects in a jolly mood and causing great uproar and mirth with his remarks.

Another case was instituted against Qaumiji and he had to go to the jail at Multan as the trial was to take place in that city. We noted with regret that the activities of the *Mouji Club* had dwindled almost to nothing in his absence.

Dr. Gopi Chand Bhargava was elected president of the Soviet in place of Qaumiji. There were several "C" class prisoners in our ward, while others were in various parts of the jail. About ten or twelve were given the cells in the outer portion of the *Siyasat Khana*. The Government had created a difficult problem for Doctor Sahib and the Congress leaders in the ward by its differential treatment of political prisoners. Doctor Sahib was trying to solve this intricate problem by tact, sympathy and care. He pleaded the same facilities for the "C" class prisoners as were allowed to those in the "A" and "B" classes. The jail authorities had through his persistent efforts agreed to allow the food for the prisoners in the *Siyasat Khana* to be cooked in the common kitchen of our ward.

They were also given the facility of association with us and permission to play volley-ball. But the difference between "C" class and better-class prisoners still remained. In addition to inequality regarding clothing, bedding, etc., there was the inequality of the jail officers' way of dealing with the men which could never be in conformity with the self-respect and dignity of the "C" class political prisoners. There was also the psychological factor of their feeling themselves in a disadvantageous and lower position. Some friends were satisfied at what was being done for them and others were not. Bad feeling and bitterness to a degree was inevitable. The better-class prisoners too were in an unhappy position. It was an old question for the solution of which many struggles and long hunger-strikes had been resorted to. One class for all was the demand that had been repeatedly made by the prisoners but the Government had not conceded it. Many had given up their classes as a protest against the inequality of status but the bureaucracy knew its game of creating divisions and would not do the right thing. The question was much deeper than the efforts for its solution by conscientious sacrifices and considerate acts of the better-placed prisoners.

Dr. Gopi Chand had suffered imprisonment in every national movement launched by the Congress and we were deeply touched

by the gratifying fact that he could think as the old prisoners thought and feel as they felt. He never gave way to the authorities on a single matter of common interest and pressed for more and more facilities for all of us. As our president, he had to look after our requirements and be our spokesman with the officers. There was no difficulty of ours that could not be solved through his patient and careful handling of our affairs. Mindful of the minutest details he showed a keen interest in every problem and a sympathetic understanding of every difficulty that demanded solution.

A new "A" or "B" class prisoner, who has never seen the jail before can take the life as it is and be indifferent to minor facilities but the old prisoner knows that he has been evolved and shaped by struggles and that valuations had always changed with the conditions of life. We could fully appreciate the efforts of Doctor Sahib in the light of our experiences.

Summing up the past, every improvement in our condition was because of a struggle, every struggle because of a unified purpose, and every purpose subject to the ideal of a better future. We had to conform to the dictates of our broadening life.

CHAPTER 18

1942 REVOLUTION

THERE was now a regular influx and outflux of Congress prisoners. Lala Deshbandhu Gupta, M.L.A., Lala Onkar Nath, Municipal Commissioner, and Lala Brij Krishan Chandiwalla of Delhi, had been in the Gujerat special jail. They were transferred from there along with Choudhari Krishan Gopal Datt of Sialkot. Guptaji was not demonstrative in expressing sympathy, love or affection. The deep penetrating quality of his vocal sympathy reminded me of Lala Sham Lal. Lala Onkar Nath's youthful friendliness of spirit was contagious; Lala Brij Krishan's regular, neat and clean habits closely resembled those of Sachar Sahib. Conscientiousness, purity of living and capacity for suffering were the first impressions that I got even as I shook hands with him. He remained with us for a short period but those impressions have not lost themselves. Choudhari Sahib was an

amateur homœopath and was introduced to us as an able exponent of the medical science of homœopathy. Swami Hans Raj improved upon this yet insufficient introduction, as he belonged to his district.

Raizada Hans Raj had returned from the Mayo Hospital. The Red Army that contained enthusiastic young men like Nawabzada Mahmud and Mazhar and Mr. Daniyal gave him a royal reception at the gate of the ward. He added to our amusement by freely participating in it. The condition of his health was however grave and it was expected that he would be released shortly on medical grounds. Thanks to his efforts a radio-set was installed in our ward, before the orders for his release came.

Talkies and radio-sets were the later inventions popularised after we had been arrested. We had in the prisoners' way discussed the question of having an opportunity to enjoy a talkie and listen to a radio. "Would the Government give us a day of freedom for that on condition that it added a month to our imprisonment?" I had asked. Qaumiji had thought over the matter for a while and replied, "No, but a year more of punishment for a single day's indulgence might appeal to them." There was of course the chance of our never getting out of the prison at all, because we were willing to pay a higher price even; moreover the offer had only an academic interest as the patent disinterestedness of the Government in our welfare shut out the possibility of its being duly made. The radio-set arrived and we forgot about ever having thought of offering conditions. The first song that we heard was *Loot Liyo Mandhir* sung by Kanan Devi. What a revolution had come in the instrumental and vocal music of our country! The song penetrated into my being like an undulating, strongly heaving flood. The ease with which it affected me was marvellous; the power with which it held me was of the nature of magic. Had I been able to retain the first impression of this song, I would perhaps have needed nothing more in life.

I did not know that it was sung by the best songstress of Bengal. I realised the extent to which the soul would starve for want of music. So far I had only read books and appreciated ideas. A writer has the sole object of making others think. A good song on the other hand makes our heart beat blindly and feverishly to the tune of the great harmony that prevails in the universe. An idea is an internal stimulus that moves us sometimes to action, but a song coming from outside buzzes in the

soul, sips at it and then flies away leaving a vacuum. I listened to many a good song and always had a feeling resembling hunger rather than satisfaction. Sometimes strong, sometimes weak, emotions of various colours tended to fill the vacuum . . . the soul was exercised to a general awakening. Tastes, hungers, sympathies and traces of gold and silver of thought touched the surface of consciousness and vanished. The dream was broken again and again but it continued.

The release of individual Satyagrahi prisoners had begun. Some had short sentences. Successful *amicus curiae* petitions had been filed on behalf of some. Qaurniji had come back from Multan but he was transferred to the Borstal Jail again after a short time. So went Mr. Daniyal Latifi. The student leaders were a happy lot. They had added much to our life by their friendly spirit. They too were set free one by one. Dr. Gopi Chand, Mr. Sachar, Mian Iftikharuddin Sahib and many important personalities had gone out. S. Partap Singh having a longer sentence (two years) remained.

The place vacated by the outgoing Congress leaders was filled by the "C" class prisoners who had been confined in the outer portion of *Siyasat Khana*. The friction between the "C" class and the "B" class prisoners that had to an extent marred our happiness for a time in the past was nowhere to be seen now. S. Partap Singh, the man who loved to share his meals with the ordinary volunteers and workers and was more happy in their company than in that of influential well-to-do people, had created an ideal atmosphere in our ward. He had come closer to us than anyone else because of this quality of his.

The release of the Satyagrahis had not yet begun when one day one of our friends, an old terrorist who had been released, came again after his re-arrest. I told Sirdarji that our friend had been in this ward before and we would now be six in place of five.

"He is no more an old terrorist and would associate more with the members of his Party which he had joined after his release."

This opinion of Sirdarji surprised me. I had never seen him make an observation of such a nature before and wanted to know more of his mind.

"How can such an intimate friend of ours associate less with us?" I asked.

"There are parties in politics and no non-party men," observed Sirdarji.

I did not fully understand him. It was difficult for me to believe that our old friend would prefer the company of his rich Party-members and forget that his proper place was with us. But the friend showed us no more of his former cordiality and was even shy of our company like a stranger. The rich members of his Party were on the most familiar terms with us but not he.

Sirdarji was one of the few prominent leaders who did not believe in obtaining facilities from the officials through their goodwill. He never tried to set up friendly relations with the authorities. He believed less in using his personal influence and more in the mass support and united will behind a demand. His approach was different in this respect. His wisdom, patience and capacity to see both sides of the picture were expressions of his democratic spirit, and not mere empiricism.

His release left a void that could not be filled. He had left a lasting impression that made us turn towards him in our mind again and again with an uncommon interest in his work outside. In his letters to us, were words of good-will that he never forgot to communicate at not very long intervals.

There were hundreds of prisoners, Socialists, Communists, old terrorists, Congressites and others arrested in the province and confined in the jails at Multan, Ambala, Montgomery, Mianwali, Gujerat, Sialkot, Ferozepore, Jhang, Lyallpur, Lahore, etc. Most of them were treated as ordinary "C" class prisoners, even more harshly, because of a stricter application of the rules in regard to them.

A concentration camp at Deoli, an out-of-the-way place about seventy miles from Ajmer and nearly as many miles from the nearest railway station, was opened to provide "safe" detention for a large number of security prisoners, as those detained without trial in open court were called. Those who were sent there from the Punjab jails were, with the exception of some placed in Division II, a standard approximately equal to that of "C" class prisoners. They were under the control of a military guard. The arrangements about their food, medical treatment and interviews were in no way satisfactory and they could in such a place rarely avail themselves of their right to have interviews. The prisoners put forth a united demand that all should be sent back to their respective provinces and the distinction between I and II Divisions abolished in favour of a uniform classification. They were eventually forced to back their demand with the declaration of hunger-strike. There was a widespread agitation in the country

and Mahatma Gandhi's statements issued in support of their demands were exceptionally critical of the Government's repressive policy. Better treatment was at last promised and the prisoners sent back to their respective provinces. Those belonging to the Punjab were mostly sent to the Gujarat Special Jail.

Now and then a sick security-prisoner from Gujarat or another jail requiring expert medical treatment at the Mayo Hospital would be transferred to Lahore Central Jail and sent back when the treatment ended. There was thus a steady flow of prisoners in our ward. Some were old friends, others not previously known to us. Some were cured and went back ; a good many of them were sent back without any appreciable improvement in their health.

Germany attacked Russia in May 1941. The fate of the socialist fatherland hung in the balance. The Communist friends were naturally perturbed. They feared it was done to gain the sympathies of Western democracies, especially England, and turn the character of the war into an anti-Bolshevist crusade. They had no faith in the imperialist powers like Britain. They had been severely critical of the individual Satyagraha campaign of the Congress and clamouring for a mass struggle to wrest power from the British imperialists. Then came Prime Minister Churchill's offer of unconditional help to Russia. America and Britain in fact began to give genuine help. The Communists now felt that the character of the war had changed and declared it a "Peoples' " War. So also did the Communist Party of India, offering unconditional support in the war effort. The Indian National Congress on the other hand was of the opinion that Indian help would be genuinely forthcoming only if Indians were given freedom enough to organise it. National honour demanded that we take part in the war not as unwilling slaves but free partners. Britain had turned down all demands for the establishment of a responsible government at the centre. There was the sense of frustration and despair in the masses whose anti-British feelings were growing day by day. The Congress as a democratic body, could never hope to rouse the enthusiasm of the common people of the country unless they were given a great cause, the assurance of their own independence, to fight for. They needed the glow of freedom, it said, in order to make willing sacrifice for the Allied Nations.

Japanese entry into the war in December 1941, their subsequent overrunning of the Far Eastern countries, and their easy

victories bringing them into Burma alarmed the British politicians. They decided upon a policy of appeasing nationalist forces in India and sent one of the Cabinet Ministers, Sir Stafford Cripps, with an offer to give India self-government after the war. The Cripps proposals fell far short of nationalist aspirations and as far as they were concerned with the defence of the country amounted to giving Indians the right to organise canteens and propaganda through pamphlets and leaflets for the duration of the war. All the major political parties rejected them and Sir Stafford went back with words of bitter condemnation for the Indian leaders.

With the fate of former British promises in the background, the Congress could not but be sceptical of any liberal plans for the future and wanted effective powers for the present as a proof of the bona fides of the British statesmen. The country was seething with unrest. The war conditions and drastic measures curbing the civil liberties of the people, the food shortage and the untold miseries of the people, added fuel to the fire. The Congress asked the British to go, putting forth the famous "Quit India" demand. The British and the American armed forces were to remain in India to conduct the war against Japan and leave as soon as the war ended. The Congress leaders further clarified their intentions of meaning no harm to the war effort. On the 8th of August 1942, the "Quit India" resolution was passed in the A.I.C.C. meeting held in Bombay authorising Mahatma Gandhi to negotiate with the Viceroy and start a mass struggle for the acceptance of the demand, if the negotiations bore no favourable results.

Mahatma Gandhi and the members of the Working Committee were arrested on the 9th August. The Government had decided to crush the Congress. They did not give Mahatmaji any chance for negotiations. Wholesale arrests began. The masses were provoked to violence and fury at the arrest of their leaders. There were simultaneous uprisings all over the country, resulting in large-scale sabotage, burning of railway stations, post offices, uprooting of railway lines, cutting of telephone and telegraph wires, etc. In several places the British Raj had come to an end and the people had set up their own government. The military and the police shot down the mobs. They were machine-gunned from aeroplanes as the Government themselves admitted later on. Burning of villages by the police and beating of men and women suspects, imposition of collective fines and confiscation of property

were some of the drastic measures adopted as a rule by the Government and their agents. Thousands of people were killed.

The Muslim League had declared that the movement was aimed against Muslims, and enjoined upon the brethren of their faith to take no part in it. Accept Pakistan, and recognise the Muslim League as the sole representative body of the Mussalmans of India, demanded the League. Their opposition to the Congress was due to their belief that it was not a national organisation common to all communities but a Hindu body. The "Quit India" resolution was opposed on the same ground.

The Communists opposed the resolution and the 1942 movement because of their declared policy of giving unconditional help in the prosecution of the war. They also wholeheartedly supported the Muslim League ideology of two nations, the Muslim and the Hindu. The trio of communism, communalism and bureaucracy held the field while those who could speak for the Congress were all behind bars. The politics of the country was vitiated and the constitutional deadlock continued. The organisation that had fought continuously for the independence of India, by fair means and above-board methods, was going through a period of severe trial. Its leaders were given no chance of speaking their minds on the recent happenings in the country. Had they been out they could have checked the violence of the people. The prisoners of the 1942 movement were neither allowed interviews nor letters and were treated worse than ordinary criminals.

Our province had been the quietest in comparison with the rest of the country, but two thousand arrests took place here. There was no kid-glove dealing with the Congress prisoners, no recognition of the public position of the eminent leaders of the organisation. All were to be treated as rebels, as the 1942 movement was virtually a rebellion directly aimed at casting aside the British yoke.

The fury of the masses continued unabated for more than six months and then began to show signs of subsiding. The field was in the hands of the Communists and Muslim Leaguers. The "Peoples'" war propaganda of the former and the Pakistan demand of the latter were gaining momentum and nationalist India was in the throes of a bitter struggle. Resentment against both the slogans knew no limits as both were taken to be a stab in the back, an invidious attack on the forces of nationalism in its darkest hour of trial. There was growing co-operation among the anti-Congress forces. British statesmen encouraged opposition

to the Congress. Fascist, pro-Japanese, unprogressive, were the adjectives freely used against the Congress leaders. They had no opportunity of replying to false insinuations against them.

The proportions that the struggle took had made it a veritable war of independence carried on in the absence of the leaders.

It had its repercussions on our minds. The upheaval in the country had shaken us to the depths. "Which side?" was the question that rose in the mind of every individual behind bars. Bitter discussions were a matter of daily occurrence. Verbal clashes of viewpoints, national and international outlooks and ideologies told upon social relations to a considerable extent. Arguments seemed to possess an extraordinary power of creating divisions and widening gulfs.

"Why should you, the most progressive party as you call yourself, use what influence you have for the division of India instead of going on with the non-communal programme for the betterment of the working classes and the peasantry?" asks a Congressman.

The Communist replies, "Let the Mussalmans unite under the banner of the Muslim League. That is the only way of removing their suspicions and inducing them to believe that they will have Pakistan."

"Why does not the idea of a national organisation such as the Congress, fighting for the welfare of Hindus and Muslims alike, appeal to you?" retorts the Congressman.

"Face the facts. The Congress has been a Hindu organisation and should become clearly so. The Muslims who are still in it will go over to the League. It is inevitable," says the Communist by way of warning.

"Hindus going to the Hindu Mahasabha, Muslims to the Muslim League, Sikhs to the Sikh communal organisation, and so on, till not a volunteer is left to work for the common welfare of all communities under the banner of the Congress is what you are aiming at. Why are you so bitter against us?" questions the Congressite.

The discussion was still in progress when a Socialist joined in. "Thousands of our people have been shot down with bullets. They demanded a national government to be in charge of the war effort. So does the whole of the country. Is it the Peoples' war for us?" he asked.

Pandit Rupchand, usually a calm and quiet person, without seeing the impropriety of intrusion, asks under the spur of emo-

tion, "Supposing we here start a struggle against the jail authorities. We may be partly wrong but the struggle has begun, would it be meet for an old companion like you to side with the jail authorities?"

He made the already critical situation more critical.

We avoid discussion, and try to raise no political issues, but at times the spirit of controversy gets the better of one or more of us. There are even differences of view among the five of us. We steer clear of the path of argument but are not so cautious with the rest of the comrades. Our old terrorist friends, most of whom have joined the Communist Party and are now confined in the Gujerat Jail, have sent word to us that we should declare for the Communists' policy. The sick friends who had brought the message are going back. The five of us have given replies that are not identical as Pandit Kishori Lal and Swami Hans Raj are Communists, while Pandit Rupchand, Malik Kundan Lal and I are not.

The realisation is upon me that there was a lot of difference between the organisation of the secret and open parties. We in the Terrorist Party enlisted only a select few and rejected even the best type of men who were not expected to work wholeheartedly on violent lines. But the various parties try to rope in as many members as they can. There is a race for creating a majority. No one sees to the merit of the workers who are to be enrolled. Success is a rare thing but efforts continue.

Politics is largely based upon hatred. One limits oneself not to a party but to its hatreds, loves, jealousies, fanaticism, blindness, and defiance of all that is not within the pale of party interests. The more truth the opposite side brings into an argument, the more it injures. The more sense one has at one's command, the more dulling effect one produces. The roots of every party are deep with the capacity to utilise the filthiest water only for the tree that is at the head of them. Canvassing with the branches is only a useless activity giving off superfluous heat.

All the atmosphere is conciliatory and timidly peaceful when a sudden militant cry is raised by someone. It is met with a counter cry. Unpleasantness is always the result. It makes me feel still more strongly that there ought to be no parties in jail but only prisoners making united efforts towards improvement of the prison conditions.

Discussions naturally lost heat with the passage of time. The efforts at making new converts were now directed towards only

a wavering few. There was, for example, the case of two ex-policemen from Hong Kong, now detained as security prisoners in our ward. They joined the Communist Party, with the object amongst others of obtaining their release. The Government had in fact released several prominent Communists and more releases of the members of the Party were expected in response to their policy of support in the war effort. Later on both the ex-policemen, who had no political views at all, allowed their connection with the Communists to lapse. One of them told me quite frankly that his objective was release and nothing more.

A new Communist prisoner came from Ferozepore Jail and I asked him about the health of Mr. M., an old friend of mine who was now a Communist, and was reported to be suffering from tuberculosis.

"You may be thinking of some other Mr. M.," he replied adding that, "no Communist could suffer from such a disease."

The new friend was evidently a man of strong faith and needed no light of reason.

"We have come committing arson, and shall go committing arson," was the cry with which a 1942 prisoner entered the gate of our ward.

He became a friend of mine because of the favourable impression the name of a terrorist gave him. "What do you think of terrorism?" he asked me one day.

"My thoughts have changed," I replied calmly.

"Thoughts cannot change," he said, flaring up. "I can swallow every idle tale, but not the one which conveys the impression that your thoughts have changed. You could not be a revolutionary then."

"They change with the situation or what you may call environment," I explained.

"But could environment make a reactionary out of you?" he asked sternly.

"I am not dead certain that it cannot."

These words of mine enraged him. He protested against the expression of any doubt. "For myself," he declared, "I am sure I shall make bombs always, in the revolution, after the revolution. . . ."

"For what purpose, may I ask?" I inquired.

He realised he had said something very strong and impracticable, and calming down a little explained that there were seven lakhs of villages in our country which must be organised.

I asked him how he reconciled village uplift work with bomb-making. He reflected for a moment and said, "All they need being taught is to use force . . . a blind irrepressible force, and that is my programme for the revolutionaries."

"The act of revolution is not to use the maximum but minimum force and thus succeed where success seems impossible! Caution, my friend, is the word for you," I argued.

I had been lately exclusively occupied in reading Communist literature. Never had I anything but deep admiration for the great experiment that Russia had undergone for the sake of humanity. I had firmly believed in the cause of Russian victory but differed from the policy of the Indian Communists on the "Pakistan" and "People's War" issues. The books were of little help to me in showing the error, if there was any, in my convictions.

How the books have increased and go on increasing indefinitely whereas minds or men capable of understanding them do not in the same proportion! Party men, as they are in politics, have generally no mind. They grasp some truths partially. Ideas slip into their heads out of simplicity and forceful clarity, but as to the details and deeper philosophy behind, they are dull and authoritative. As if some irregular unshapely weapons get into the hands of some with which they fight head foremost. They are the followers, typical followers, lacking the calmness of vision and intellect, who do not understand that most of the philosophical ideas they carry are a burden on their minds, a cause of more dissatisfaction with their opponents than is meet and proportionate.

CHAPTER 19

FRIENDS COME AND GO; ONE DEPARTS FOREVER!

MR. MUHAMMAD YAMIN DAR, Babu Muhammad Din of Lahore, Agha Shorish Kashmiri, S. Kultar Singh, Professor Tilak Raj Chadha of Rawalpindi, and many other comrades had one by one come to swell our ranks. Our ward was limited

to security prisoners and convicted prisoners. Doctor Gopi Chand, Mr. Virendra of *Partap*, Lahore, Lala Deshbandhu Gupta, Maulana Daud Gaznavi, Diwan Chaman Lal, Sirdar Atma Singh of Sheikhpura, Seth Sudarshan, Jathedar Chanan Singh, Lala Raghunandan Saran and Lala Onkar Nath of Delhi and other prominent political leaders had one by one come to our jail for medical treatment but they were kept separate from us in two different wards. The inhuman conditions under which they had been living had visibly told upon their health. Some of them were suffering from serious diseases. L. Raghunandan Saran and L. Deshbandhu Gupta were suffering from diseases of the nervous system which defied all treatment.

There were numerous convicted prisoners who had taken active part in the sabotage campaign. We could not meet all of them because they were kept as ordinary criminals in different "C" class barracks. The leaders and some of the convicted prisoners told us harrowing tales of Government repression, of firing on unarmed peaceful mobs, of attacks on the honour of women, and so on. The masses had gone through tremendous suffering. The mutiny of 1857 paled into insignificance before this conflagration which had just outwardly subsided but inwardly continued to smoulder in the hearts of millions of our countrymen. They had only demanded to turn the war into a Peoples' war for Indians and learnt to their cost that imperialist Britain would not have it.

The sick prisoners from the three political wards went in turn to the Mayo Hospital for treatment as the accommodation arrangements there allowed, and came back. Those who were cured were transferred to their respective jails, the others remained.

Professor Tilak Raj Chadha, a young intellectual from my district, was suffering from diseased gall-bladder and appendicitis. He was liable to fits of excruciating pain because of these troubles. His digestion had failed, his health broken down. He had daily temperature. Continued incarceration since the beginning of the war had sapped his energies. He lost in flesh but gained in spirit. More sympathetic towards the other sick comrades than the healthy ones, more careful of the sentiments of others than anyone of us, he seemed to carry on as if there was nothing wrong with his health. He had to undergo two major operations. His life was at stake. He was the type of young man who stakes his life for a noble cause and never gives importance to his physical well-being. He had a variety of interests and a versatile

mind. It was a pleasure to talk to him. His exceptional sociable qualities had earned for him the respect of all irrespective of party affiliations and propaganda campaigns. He brought a healthy influence to bear upon matters relating to our social life. I usually tried to interest him in the dietetic method of the famous American, Dr. Kellogg. He tried various suggestions but his diseases were in too far advanced a stage to yield to changes in the diet.

Comrade Muhammad Yamin Dar had hernia and appendicitis in addition to various other troubles. He was "fiery, tempestuous and a friend of friends" type of man. A comrade of lesser abilities would quail before the mighty onrush of his words. He would let heat into an argument and loved to rush the matter into an extreme and then turn the whole thing into a joke. Perhaps it was an exceptional power of "timely recovery" of his.

We came to know him as a man of emotion, of sentiments that gave stability and faithfulness to his character. "Good society and improved environment had taken the edge off our bellicosity," said I, and he confessed that he doubted whether there was in him even a needful quantity of the useful stuff that was abundant in the days of his youth. His stormy character had indeed acquired steadfastness and ripeness of wisdom that was of great help to us in our day-to-day problems. His sarcasm and bantering tone were resented by no one. He had the knack of making himself familiar with those who showed natural reserve and lack of cordiality.

S. Kultar Singh had the coolest of temperaments ever found in an energetic and lively young man. His portly figure enhanced the effect of his congenial disposition and conciliatory habits.

These newly arrived young men had added charm to our society.

In the spring of 1943, we were one morning told the tragic news of the death of a "C" class 1942 prisoner in the jail hospital. We had neither heard his name nor of his being in the jail and were for the first and last time acquainted with him only at his death.

"Devi" belonged to Delhi district; he was a prisoner of the August disturbances. This was the meagre introduction of him given by another prisoner belonging to Delhi. No one could tell us more about his life and his work.

Death becomes a more terrible word to a prisoner because his mind and heart tend to become more susceptible to injuries and

shocks. Here was no case of a simple death but that of extreme penalty for the offence of patriotism.

The man from Delhi district lay in the mortuary which was nothing more than a few dirty mud-berths protected by a dingy roof supported by frayed, time-beaten, dirt-beaten walls impervious to the influence of whitewash. The smell of decomposition greeted us as we stood at the door. He lay upon a rag like a wretched hospital blanket, a black, bloodless, fleshless human being with thin and longish bones. A poorer "C" class dress, consisting of a redlined shirt, short like a banian, and pyjamas hardly reaching below his knees, adorned his body. His mien was humble, his features drawn and emaciated and his eyes haggard and open. He had died from loss of blood, though lack of nourishment was the only cause of his death. A quantity of milk and curds and butter and fruits would have saved his life. The doctor could have stopped his bleeding with a little more care and effort, which he evidently did not expend.

"Devi" was so helpless, so unassuming, so resigned as to die without uttering a word of protest against the lack of proper treatment and bearable conditions in the jail. If a prisoner wants to have a packet of cigarettes, or an ounce of butter or half a pound of milk in addition to what the rules permit him, he must have recourse to smuggling. Another method is bribing the doctor or a jail official. Both the methods require money. It was certain that "Devi" had no money, or he would have managed to live. No one could die of bleeding piles in a few days, nor the bleeding continue for more than a limited period. Perhaps writing off his life was in his blood and he had no urge to live under the wretched prison conditions.

We were too deeply moved at the moment to apportion blame for indifference towards his life on the medical or the executive authorities. The foreign rule against which we were fighting was the root-cause of all our misfortunes. We did not talk but all were evidently thinking on the same lines.

We brought flowers from the garden of our ward; the jail employees brought the shroud. "Devi" was wrapped up in it. We showered flowers upon him. How weak he was, lighter even than a child. But he was strong in death which he had bravely met. A poor man whom no one knew, had made an immense sacrifice and admirably acquitted himself of the burden of slavery that hung heavily over his lean shoulders.

His emaciated lean figure wrapped up in death and sprinkled

with flowers was ready for the fire—we carried him to the jail gate—and he became smoke and ashes. He had died after becoming so startlingly weak, so staggeringly bloodless as if all the poverty, all the wretchedness of our enslaved masses was symbolised in him. We stood in reverential awe before this mighty personality which had gained from environment, and his own indomitable impulse to face death had risen higher than all the mortals present before him. I felt a sort of weakness in my chest and limbs as the cold logic of a life-and-death struggle made itself felt all through me.

CHAPTER 20

A "BIT OF MORALISM"

A PRISONER as a rule felt no need for struggling against corruption which had in addition to its evils all the qualities of a useful institution, in the jails. There was hardly any field for practising unprofitable kindness and unfruitful humanitarianism in this forsaken part of the world where fear ruled, want supervised and misery modified the conduct of the unfortunate captives. Dire necessity urged upon a prisoner to find a way out and an officer or a warder had to be totally callous in order to refuse his unfortunate appeal backed by an offer of money. It was an attitude highly objectionable on moral grounds, but the morality of the free could never be practicable for a slave. A human specimen has been denied by law all except a few of the good things of the world that can provide a sense of well-being and afford an occasional pleasure to his mind and body and he tries to cope with the circumstances. Smuggling is a part of his struggle for better conditions in the prison. He has spent some money, and thereby obtained the mitigation of suffering and the toning down of the harshness of fate. He was, for example, being put up before the Superintendent for a jail offence and the timely expenditure of a rupee or two has saved him from imprisonment for a month or two more that would have been the result of his being punished.

The laws are strict and stern leaving little scope for escape

from them. They are meant to muffle the voice of humanity, of any free expression of a will, of a desire, of a natural emotion or an instinct. They show the fist to the head and a slap to the face. The problem of all problems before a prisoner is how to avoid them. There is the ever present fear that he may be caught unawares in the clutches of a law the nature of which might never be understood. The moods of an officer may mean a lot of difference. One is at the mercy of absolute power.

The laws do not allow smuggling. A severe disciplinarian officer takes charge and tries to stop it. A Superintendent or a Deputy Superintendent bent upon stopping it succeeds to a considerable extent. He can never fully eradicate the corruption or smuggling though he undoubtedly succeeds in creating famine conditions, unprecedented scarcity of things accompanied by exorbitant increase in prices. A packet of cheap cigarettes ordinarily costing two pice may not be easily available even for two rupees; the anti-smuggling measures have done this. The illiterate non-political prisoners feel crushed and suffocated in their limited space. They are more and more inclined to whining and complaining. It inevitably brings trouble and punishments upon them. A struggle on their part is the natural result.

The tightening of jail discipline is usually the sign that the officer newly come is creating favourable conditions for subsequent exploits in the field of mutual benefit. The prisoners with past experience understand the officer who enforces fresh restrictions.

The advent of a corrupt officer signifies better days for those who can break jail laws with the help of money. An incorruptible officer on the other hand is usually considered a monstrosity, a hard, cruel being, lacking in some essential quality of the heart. It might be found that either he has no offspring, or no harmonious family life or is failing in something of the sort that has sucked his heart dry of little kindness and great joys and left him shrivelled in soul and poor in social qualities. That is how a stickler for discipline is understood in the jail.

The struggle of non-political prisoners is essentially similar to ours. The difference lies in the fact that we outside as well as inside the jail are the most vocal section of the masses. A jail officer, for that very reason does not dare to demand bribes from us. We are the people who in a way create our own problems and add to our own difficulties because of our vocal qualities. We cannot get rid of a difficulty or restriction or punishment through spending a coin or two and thus appeasing the author-

ities. We cannot buy facilities but must earn them by toil. They dub us propagandists and enemies of peace and rarely give credence to what we bring to their notice about conditions in the jail. The authoritative people are touchy and jealous of their power. We too have acquired a certain amount of touchiness because of the suppressive atmosphere around us and usually find ourselves inclined to make much of small quarrels with them.

There is a comparative quiet and peace in the jail, not because of any extensive jail reforms carried out by the Government, but because they have during the war inaugurated a policy of releasing long-term prisoners before the expiry of their sentences. The non-political convicts undergoing life-imprisonment are being released after they have spent from eleven to twelve years including remission. The Honourable Minister for Jails periodically visits the jail and recommends the premature release of prisoners who are put up before him by the Superintendent. This generous policy of the Government has created an atmosphere of hope in the mind of long-term prisoners. They can look to an early release if their jail conduct has been good. The troublesome days of the notorious badmashes, who never found themselves outside the punitive cells or "Badmash Line," are a thing of the past. The leniency on the part of the Government has taken the sting out of the prisoners' struggles. They suffer more patiently. The majority of the prison population consists of the agriculturist class, the peasants. They have more money nowadays in consequence of higher prices of agricultural products and can therefore spend more. Keeping their jail records clean, which means avoiding "*peshis*" (punishments) is the foremost concern in their mind. They can pay enormous sums of money to get rid of a threatened *peshi*.

This comparative peacefulness is not natural, however. My case fellow, Pandit Rupchand, is a bit of a moralist. Why should it be, he says, that better conditions are synonymous with the rule of corrupt officers? The chronic indigestion of Pandit Rupchand makes him gather unfavourable impressions of the happiness that bribery affords to the prisoners. He takes a long-range view of things with a tinge of melancholy. He feels that the prisoners have in reality lost their fighting qualities and become considerably demoralised.

The poor who can't pay suffer more and more when such a state of affairs prevails. The system no doubt works thus. The barber of our ward fell ill and was sent to the jail hospital. He

remained there under observation for three days and had daily temperature, but the doctor-in-charge refused to admit him as a regular patient or put him on diet. He complained to the Medical Officer against the doctor and the latter felt offended. Next day a fellow-prisoner beat the poor barber to please the doctor. The barber was an old prisoner, thin and weak, and fever added to the uneasiness he felt about himself in the hospital. He sent word to our ward asking our advice whether he should gratify the doctor's greed. Two of us went to the hospital and pleaded for sympathy towards the patient but the doctor was too cunning to admit any lack of care for or any displeasure against the barber. The comrades came back without having effected any improvement in the situation. The barber had to appease the doctor by paying four rupees. He thus remained in the hospital for more than a fortnight and was given milk and curds and bread and butter, fruit being another wholesome addition to his diet. He looked much improved in health on his return to our ward. Pandit Rupchand agreed that the doctor deserved thanks. The barber told us that he could have had the rich diet for two rupees in place of four but for his moral scruples. "Damned cheap," remarked the Pandit goodnaturedly.

Abnormal conditions create abnormal personalities. There is an assistant superintendent, very energetic, very friendly, care-free and courageous, who has been long in service. He has never done a good service to any prisoner without adequate recompense. He was our "in charge" for several months. His inspection visit to the jail was nothing but a careful survey of the grain godown, the clothing godown, the garden, our ward and other places for things of personal requirement. He scoured the jail for the purpose. Now and then catching sight of a prisoner illegally making tea or cooking something, he would collect his due and move on. Whenever a prisoner doing the labour of a blacksmith or a tinsmith met him, he was certain to ask him to make something for him. He demanded rope from the rope-maker, gram from the gram-distributor, and so on. The sight of a prisoner automatically made him think of the service he could possibly exact. His eyes were keen, his mind alert. He would cancel a *peshi* for four or five times the sum of money any other officer would gladly accept and was still a friend of the prisoners.

The new Superintendent, a very honest officer who was making sincere efforts for the improvement of the food and rations of

the prisoners, had stopped the "*dalis*" for officers from the jail garden. The Assistant Superintendent had to go foraging for vegetables for his household, and fodder for his buffalo. He had been dismissing our interviewers without even letting us know that anyone had come to see us. We never expected him to carry his depredations into our ward, but he, true to his habit of never putting his foot into a place without something practical in his mind, showed much interest in our garden and on his return took away an armful of vegetables. Henceforward he was careful about our interviews and other rightful privileges. In a few days he had arranged with our washerman for washing the clothes of his household. He utilised the services of our tailor, barber, and other prisoners employed in menial work. They sewed clothes brought by him, gathered grass for his buffalo, and served him in various ways. He gave false promises of remission to these workers only to make them work for him. Always laughing, always non-serious, he allowed us no opportunity to fall out with him.

He would take away the raw mangoes from our young tree. "It is only for the *chatni*," he told us when we protested. We were greatly interested to see the ripening of the fruit which our tree had borne for the first time, but the officer took away three or four mangoes daily while we were in the playground. He knew that we could not pick a quarrel with him on such a small matter. He realised that it was difficult for us to refuse him a seer or two of green vegetables. He knew many things about all prisoners and took advantage of his insight into human nature. When anyone came in a car to interview a Congress leader, he would politely ask for the use of his car for just half an hour while the interview lasted, and then have a joy-ride through the city for an hour or two as his understanding of the "situation" permitted. He saw humanity from the standpoint of its utility. Finding out new items, new ways and means and inventing new methods for filling his pockets and harnessing the people to serve his interests was his speciality, an art amongst the arts that had found in him the greatest protagonist. He was like the proverbial noble deputed by his sovereign to count the waves of the sea. The Superintendent gave him duties in places where he was supposed to "earn" nothing, but he nullified the efforts of his superior through his ingenuity and skill. At last the former had him transferred to another jail.

The Superintendent got rid of him but there were the lesser

luminaries, a bit rougher in dealing with the prisoners but ploughmen all the same, active for the harvest.

It was under the circumstances really impossible for a prisoner to give up what was to him simply buying of articles of use as well as services. Two seers of milk and other valuable items of diet could be had for a month for four or five rupees.

Money could provide relief from drudgery, from irksome labour and many other causes of irritation and dissatisfaction. The officers and warders thus helped the prisoners to become habitual law-breakers and confirmed believers in underhand methods. Individualism of the most selfish sort was encouraged in detriment to the social habits of struggling together. Everyone tried to fend for himself through thick and thin, looking only to the marketable generosity of the jail officials. The scheme for educating the illiterate prisoners was vitiated by bribery because the remission promised to those whose progress in education might be reported, could be had from an obliging officer without making any actual effort at reading and writing. The slow poison of callousness and indifference towards one another was increasingly affecting the mental and moral health of the prisoners. Much could be attributed to the war-conditions. The prisoners who bribed the officers were no less responsible for corruption because they left no stone unturned in obtaining illegal satisfaction of their needs.

We, the politicals, were fortunate in depending upon unity and concord amongst ourselves. Joint pressure was the sole means at our disposal to obtain concessions. To fight on moral grounds was rightly expected of us. Even the jail officers were in a position to criticise us if we raised selfish issues. We acquiesced in the jail officials' right of censuring our conduct for the sake of the corresponding right of raising questions relating to general mismanagement in the jail. It depended upon what sort of officer had to deal with us. We were at times allowed to plead for improvements of a general nature in respect of all the prisoners. We had become "old prisoners" and some though not all officers treated us so far as they could like gentlemen. It was all due to the personal goodness of the new Superintendent.

CHAPTER 21

A LIKELY ISSUE OR A CRUEL JOKE

THE question of our release had again attracted our attention. It had its past history and had the effect of projecting our thoughts into the future. It was nothing more than a prisoner's view, that we too should be released like the ordinary criminals who were getting out not a day after serving ten or eleven years of imprisonment. The Congress leaders present here were interested in the question. We kept our pessimism to ourselves and let them use their influence with the Punjab Ministry.

The Government had never clearly defined what was meant by the term transportation for life though their policy as enunciated in the statement of the Punjab Premier, in the Legislative Assembly in 1938, was to release life-term prisoners after the expiry of fourteen years' rigorous imprisonment, including remission. They stuck to this policy in case of non-political prisoners, but had no doubt laid down a different standard for us. Pandit Kishori Lal had completed his fourteen years in 1941 but was not yet released. Mr. K. L. Gauba, a distinguished lawyer of Lahore, filed a Habeas Corpus petition on his behalf in the High Court. Mr. Gauba had been an "A" class prisoner in jail and we had met him and discussed the legal points for the petition. He took no fees and within a few days of his release filed the petition. The law point which he put before the court was that Pandit Kishori Lal had been sentenced to transportation for life, which sentence was neither carried out nor commuted, and that the prisoner had been undergoing rigorous imprisonment which could not exceed fourteen years. Mr. Justice Monroe did not accept the ground for the petition and no hearing took place. A revision petition filed later on was rejected. Mr. Pritt, a London lawyer, filed an appeal in the Privy Council against the decision of the Lahore High Court.

We knew little about law and even less about legal procedure but we had made up our minds to take the decision for or against the law point raised by us. The jail authorities had testified to the effect that Pandit Kishori Lal was undergoing rigorous imprisonment, which in the words of the Criminal Procedure Code "should in no way exceed fourteen years." The Pandit should

have been transported (transportation for life meant being sent to the Andamans) and failing that his sentence according to the *Jail Manual* ought to have been commuted to that of rigorous imprisonment. The Government had done neither. A favourable decision would have meant a lot of difference to the lifers whose fate depended on the mercy and whim of the bureaucracy. An adverse decision could anyhow do no more than give the Government the already existing right to keep us in jail for any length of time they desired. The case was now before the Privy Council.

After Pandit Kishori Lal's came my turn. I had completed my fourteen years by the end of 1943. Another Habeas Corpus petition was filed, the decision on which was postponed pending the outcome of the first case before the Privy Council. A year and a half went by. In the beginning of 1944 we at last learned that the Privy Council had upheld the Government contention that they were not bound to release Pandit Kishori Lal until he had finished the tentative limit of twenty-five years' imprisonment with or without remission. The Council, however, made it clear that they could not restrict the Government to regard the twenty-five years' limit as definite.

Pandit Rupchand, Malik Kundan Lal and Swami Hans Raj too completed their term but the doors of the law had been shut once and for all against us. Our rolls were sent to the Government and they ordered them to be resubmitted after each one of us had completed eighteen years. The Privy Council decision had given them unlimited powers and made their absolutism more absolute than the most pessimistic expectations of any of us. We would have preferred to remain indefinitely in jail to this strengthening of the hands of the bureaucracy. A little faith in the law had resulted in being cheated out of all chances of obtaining legal help. We were afraid of the repercussions of the Privy Council decision upon the non-political lifers in the jail, who had to blame none but us if the Government changed their policy of releasing them after fourteen years, but to our great relief the old policy of leniency continued in their case.

Mr. Justice Monroe had on the occasion of the informal hearing of Pandit Kishori Lal's petition remarked that the case was that of a dangerous terrorist criminal, and our subsequent experience of law courts had convinced us that the law would sense danger and terrorism whenever we made an approach to it. We knew that the war was on and it was the only hindrance to our release. We also had the information that the Punjab Ministry had been

considering our cases for release before the commencement of the war. But the idea that the war was going to end in a year or so was prevalent all over the world and the possibility of our being set free after a year or more had begun to affect our minds. We saw absolutely no use in raising the release question before peace came to the world, but it had raised itself from its former vague and unconscious existence into a real issue awaiting solution within less than two years at the most. The ever-receding and slippery liberty had come within the ambit of plausible guesses and reasonable calculations.

The invasion of the Continent had brought the end of the war nearer. Germany was on her last legs. Some provincial Congress leaders were released on medical grounds. One of them met a high-ranking official in connection with our release and was told that the Government would let us out on our completing twenty years. He asked whether the end of the war would mean any change in this attitude of the Government towards the terrorist prisoners and was informed that that might be the case but he could at present give no assurance of any change. Asked why the rolls of certain prisoners had been ordered to be resubmitted after completion of eighteen years and not twenty he replied that it was only a matter of official routine signifying no definite limit. It was really salutary, this knowledge of the official mind. We were however not impressed by their intentions to keep us for twenty years. We had more faith in our estimate of two years more of prison life than in that of six years proposed by the high-ranking authority. We talked about the future when we sat together, at table, in the radio room or walked in our garden. We formulated our plans without being overserious about them. Malik Kundan Lal, the big schemer, was to earn forty crores of rupees, equal to the census of the Indian population and Pandit Kishori Lal was to become his managing agent. The former only feared a dangerous kick from the latter when the scheme was complete. Other fears were of smaller nature, of playing the dual role of instigating strikers in the newly established industrial concerns, of breaking the spokes of the running wheel of prosperity, etc., etc. I had had many occasions for speaking on business with L. Prithvi Chand Nayyar of the A.I.S.A. who had four hundred thousand acres of land (desert) in the south-west of our province and he agreed to send me the information I required on his release if I persisted in my vast agricultural project. Pandit Rupchand had the standing offer of Jathedar

Chanan Singh to become his Private Secretary or munshi, as he was supposed to be an expert in writing letters and preparing despatches. Swami Hans Raj had to think of organising a press.

One untoward happening at this time affected us deeply. A C.I.D. man who had been living amongst us (one is never sure whether one is a police spy or not) was released and he made many reports to his department, both false and true. He reported amongst other things, that the convicted terrorist prisoners and the security prisoners detained without trial were kept in the same place and that the former were availing themselves of all facilities allowed by rules to the latter. The result was that the Government ordered the Jail Superintendent to confine the two categories of prisoners in separate places. We five remained in the Terrorist Ward while the others were ordered to shift to the two other political wards, though accommodation was already scarce there. The order meant a great inconvenience for all but it had to be carried out.

We were again deprived of good society. It had been a "war measure" sort of privilege that we had been enjoying and we knew that the Government had never meant to give us the right of association with the prisoners of any category except those of our own. The lonely furrow of our life-path spanned the short length of our world, and the illusion of release no more diverted our attention.

The intervening wall of indifference had nevertheless broken. We could foresee our freedom in the not very distant future. The world let our dreams pass through its dust-coloured veil. Their paths lay through winds, storms, the gaseous nebulae of tall buildings, tumults, laughter and sunshine and multitudinous gatherings of men, old friends, forgotten relatives; past visions of roads and places were revived during sleep and entered into consciousness from some backdoor of the memory. The dreams referred more and more to the world at large while the conscious mind was yet under the pressure of hard reality of the present. My natural pessimism was mindful of the pitfalls of exuberant hopes. The emancipation of the soul in bondage was yet to be effected. The breath, the nerve, the eye and the heart had to be awakened from their long communion with the close, narrow atmosphere of the prison. The past, standing sentinel on the threshold of the present, questioned the birthright of fresh hopes and new plans to contact the future.

What is the past but a series of feelings and emotions, cries

and counter cries of life in travail? The jail life had conditioned our future. I saw our release as part of a never ending struggle. The change for the better had to be forced by the nation. There were prospects of a struggle continuing several years after the end of the war and our fate was dependent upon the after-war position of the nationalist forces of our country. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Mahatma Gandhi had been released, but not because of a changed attitude of the Government towards the Indian National Congress. We could only believe in the efforts of the nationalist leaders, in the public pressure and in the voice of the country. Never could we have faith in the good-will of the present ministry which was helpless before the impassive dignity of the permanent officials and possessed no real powers.

Dr. Gopi Chand, L. Raghunandan Saran, S. Atma Singh of Sheikhpura and some other prominent Congress leaders were released on medical grounds or otherwise. The Akali leaders, Jathedars Sohan Singh, Jalal Usman and Chanan Singh and others were also released one by one. Choudhari Kartar Singh, M.L.A., had come for dental treatment from Rawalpindi. The recent arrest of Mr. Bikram Lal Sondhi and some other Congressmen showed that the Government were yet mindful of the need of both-way prison-traffic. L. Deshbandhu Gupta, Mr. Virendra, Moulana Daud Ghaznavi and several newly arrived friends were interested in the question of our release. Friends outside were also continuing their efforts but the Government saw no reason for deflecting from their considered policy.

The *Tribune* of Lahore had published a note about Mr. Virendra's reported serious condition of health, and the Minister for Jails himself came to the jail to see him. Mr. Virendra told the Minister that the report in the paper was exaggerated though he had an undiagnosed trouble in the region of the appendix weakening his health, but it was nothing serious in his view. He did not wish to be released because of this. Mr. Virendra on the other hand pressed for the release of the terrorist prisoners. He pleaded with the Minister that we five should be shown the same leniency as was shown to ordinary life-convicts. The Superintendent, Rai Sahib B. C. Katoch, was present at this interview and he also strongly recommended our release on grounds of our excellent conduct in the jail. The Minister was patiently listening to the facts of our case as presented to him by Mr. Virendra but he showed no willingness to consider our case sympathetically. The forceful and persistent pleading of Mr. Virendra

at last made him agree to see us himself on the occasion of his next visit. He said he would ascertain our views and see what could be done.

Mr. Virendra remained for a few days more in the prison and was then transferred to Mayo Hospital for the diagnosis of his trouble. He could have easily obtained his release had he only verbally confirmed the statement in the Press about his health, but he was a straightforward, undemonstrative young man of set principles and youthful spirit. He had some days before received a notice to show cause why he should not be detained for a further period of six months, and had replied that he as a member of the Congress believed in the policy and programme of the organisation and was proud of what he had done for the country's sake under the banner of the Congress.

There were along with him five or six other political prisoners undergoing treatment in the "sick" wards of the Mayo Hospital. Comrade Muhammad Yamin Dar had been there waiting for an operation for hernia. The warder of the jail who used to take food to the prisoner-patients brought daily news about their health. Mr. Virendra one day came, with the permission of the jail authorities, to see us. He said it would be better for us to prepare also a written application giving the reasons for our release and hand it to the Minister on the day of his visit.

On the 21st of March the Honourable Minister for Jails paid a visit to the jail and we were called to the office to appear before him. Swami Hans Raj's health reports indicating high blood pressure had been brought to his notice by the jail authorities. The medical officer of the jail was called in to give his opinion about Swamiji's present state of health. The Home Secretary had also accompanied the Minister to the prison.

The Minister asked Swami Hans Raj various questions, about his health, his views about terrorism, etc., and seemed to be satisfied with his answers. He then asked whether any others of us were suffering from any serious trouble and we told him that it was not the case. The Superintendent, Rai Sahib B. C. Katoch, handed over our application to the Home Secretary and declared that he strongly recommended our case for release. He told the Minister that our conduct in the jail had been satisfactory, that he considered us well-behaved gentlemen and could confidently say that we would prove useful citizens if released.

The medical officer had explained the nature of the reports about Swamiji's blood pressure which was a serious thing for a

man of his young age.

The Minister and the Home Secretary went away, and on the 23rd of March orders were issued to the jail authorities for the release of Swami Hans Raj on condition of his depositing a security of Rs. 2,000. Instructions were issued by the Home Secretary to transfer Swamiji to Sialkot, the jail of his home district, in order to facilitate the deposit of security. It was a matter of deepest satisfaction to us to see our suffering comrade obtain his freedom. We went to the jail gate, to bid him farewell. The release of a lifer is always like a rebirth and we felicitated him on his entry again into the world after full twelve years of prison life.

He was however not released and came back from Sialkot after a week. It was a great shock to see him back. It transpired that his release orders had been cancelled the day after his reaching Sialkot Jail. We could not see any reason for this cruel joke upon a sick person like him. We had with our own eyes seen the release orders wherein his remaining sentence was remitted by the Governor and now he was here again as if the illusion of freedom was created to give poignancy to the bitter days of his remaining life in jail. We felt that it was the arrogant answer to our demand for release, and took it calmly like a rejected appeal for justice.

CHAPTER 22

COMRADE YAMIN'S DEATH

THE day of the operation drew near and comrade Yamin came to see us. No physical weakness could take away the vivacity of his spirit, and he remained all day long with us, telling stories about the hospital, doctor and nurses and our other comrades present there. Last time he had been sent back to the Gujerat jail while the extraction of his teeth and other dental treatment was still going on. He had come back this time for completion of the dental treatment and for an operation for hernia. The extraction of a single tooth gave him trouble for many days because the bleeding of his gums would not

stop. The doctors were giving him calcium injections for anæmia. None of his major visceral organs was even in a tolerably healthy condition. But he could never outwardly look serious or sick. He had again and again come from Gujerat in connection with the treatment of his ailments and this was the fourth time. Love and regard for us had been all the while in the process of incubation and the proof of his swelling sympathy and increasing attachment was found in his most intelligent and considerate attitude towards the understanding of our hunger for society. He introduced new political workers and laboured persistently to unite them to us on the basis of fast friendship. Mr. Yudhvir of *Milap*, Lahore, was introduced by him to us. Pandit Lekh Ram, the editor of *Hindi Milap*, and many friends previously unknown, met us like intimate friends and we knew that it was comrade Muhammad Yamin's friendship working for us. His readiness to give and take and his other good traits almost amounting to defects, made us fear an emotional outburst sometimes, but we had by and by come to know the exactly opposite quality of his unemotional reading into human character.

He understood quite well that medical treatment was not the undisputed right of a political prisoner. He moreover knew that outside the jail it was difficult for an active political worker to spend two or three months in a hospital for the sake of his health. Several such considerations weighed with him and he decided to undergo the operation he had come for.

"I am a timid Kashmiri, inclined to make a tremendous noise, under the knife of a surgeon," he jokingly told us that day.

"I may die," said he in the same jocular vein pointing out the proverbial easiness with which a Kashmiri could be dead.

We told him of the well-known persistence of the Kashmiris.

"I cannot waste my time on operations and treatment outside," he reasoned aloud.

What an unemotional and exacting attitude he had regarding his health and his life! The time that he spent that day with us was of a jolly nature. We had been touching upon the minor keys of his jocular nature and boisterous mirth remained his occupation of the day. In the evening he asked for some gramophone records and a few other things that he wanted to take with him to the hospital and prepared to go.

The operation did not succeed as the wound became septic. The warder on duty brought news of his growingly serious condition every day, but there was no danger to his life he assured

us. Penicillin injections were given him but they did not prove effective. He died at 4-30 A.M. on the 12th of April, 1945.

We went to the jail office and saw that the letter he had written five days before to his wife and children asking them to come and see him in the hospital, was still lying uncensored and unposted-at the table where the C.I.D. officer used to work. They could not even see him before his death.

A few days later came Mr. Patnaik of Orissa, a detenu and a former captain of the Air Transport Service, who was a patient in the hospital in those days, and told us many touching stories of the last days of comrade Yamin.

"I wish I could weep," he had said half-seriously one day to his comrade in the hospital before the operation.

"Who forbids you to do so? Begin right now so that I may see what you look like doing that!" retorted the humorous airman, Mr. Patnaik.

"What is the use of weeping before an impertinently unsympathetic fellow like you?" asked comrade Yamin.

"A doctor or a nurse would be better company. I should call one," suggested Mr. Patnaik.

Raising his head a little from the pillow Yamin smiled a helpless smile and replied, "I could weep, but for the presence of these policemen of the guard. What would they say if I wept before them?" He went on in an emotional strain. "I have not wept even during the intense pain that I have occasionally felt. I have enough reason for weeping and have felt the urge to do so many a time these days. I have wept to my heart's content on several occasions in the past without any rhyme or reason and had always felt a relief. I feel I shall do it after going back to the jail from the hospital!"

His strong emotions had linked him with his friends, with the country and with the cause of her freedom. His heart and mind were sound and active even when the whole of his body below the chest became the hotbed of septic poison. The swelling increased with the poison and he felt no pain because of an overwhelming love that had surged up in his heart for the present or absent friends dear to him. The doctors were making frantic efforts to save his life, but he was calmly contemplating the faces of the comrades standing near his bed. Suddenly he began to gasp, and passed away in a few moments. His death was a cruel shock to all of us.

CHAPTER 23

NET RESULTS

GERMANY surrendered on 8th May. Her fate had sealed the fate of her eastern partner Japan too. The end of the Pacific War was not far off. The Government relaxed their repressive policy to the extent of releasing some ailing prisoners. Mr. Virendra, Lala Deshbandhu Gupta, Mr. Patnaik, Mr. B. L. Sondhi and a few others were set free, but restrictions were imposed on their movement and speech.

The Viceroy proposed to call a conference of the leaders of different parties of India in order to find out ways and means of ending the constitutional deadlock. He also announced that the members of the Congress Working Committee were being released to allow them to take part in the forthcoming conference.

The Congress President Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and other members of the Working Committee came out of prison after about three years of continued incarceration. There was a large gathering at Simla of leaders of various parties in addition to the invitees to the conference. Mr. Virendra went there after obtaining special permission. Scores of friends who had known us in jail were there. The ban on the Congress High Command had been lifted and it had taken up the question of the release of all political prisoners including the pre-reform prisoners like us. Mahatma Gandhi declared that the release question was of foremost importance at the moment and was being brought to the notice of the Government with all the urgency it demanded.

The Congress President, Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, undertook to contact the Viceroy on the issue. Our friends Dr. Gopi Chand, L. Deshbandhu Gupta, Mr. Virendra, Seth Sudarshan, Raizada Hans Raj, L. Bhim Sen Sachar, S. Atma Singh of Sheikhpura, Master Ajit Singh Ambalvi, Jathedar Sohan Singh, Jalal Usman and many others utilised the opportunity of the presence of all the high officials and ministers at Simla, and pressed the question of our release. L. Deshbandhu Gupta and Mr. Virendra again saw the Minister for Jails. Dr. Gopi Chand

and several other Congressmen met Moulana Azad and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in this connection. The Akali friends approached Sardar Baldev Singh, the Development Minister, and impressed upon him the necessity of adopting a generous policy towards the release of terrorists.

Never had our question been put before the Government with such concerted pressure. Mr. Virendra had been trying since the day he arrived at Simla, to interest important personages in the issue of our release. We could never have raised it with such persistence as he did even in the presence of the immensely important problem before the country of solving the constitutional deadlock. We as well as our well-wishers knew that we would be free if the conference succeeded. The country was demanding the changes that were for the interest of the whole population of the vast prison that was India. Our sympathisers and well-wishers had done much to bring our particular case to the notice of the Congress President, and deserved our gratitude.

The conference failed. The proposals that the Congress and Muslim League leaders, Mr. Bhulabhai Desai and Nawabzada Liaqat Ali Khan had submitted to the Viceroy before his departure to London, had been vitiated by the changes that had been effected in them by the British Government; and the distorted version of those proposals brought back by the Viceroy for the Indian leaders to deliberate upon, could bear no fruitful results.

What had been done and said for us even in view of the probable failure of the conference was gratifying to us in the extreme. So much good-will and kindly feeling had been lavished upon us that we felt we owed a debt to the people that could never be paid. It was no exaggeration to say that the question was overstressed. We wanted to forget the topic of our release, but it cropped up again and again when some friend wrote a hopeful letter or sent a cheerful message. One day the news came that the prospects of release were gloomy, another day we would hear of a fairly good chance of liberation in the very near future. Weeks, months, days, figured in guesses and calculations of friends outside. Our own estimate of two years that we had made was no guarantee that we were not liable to change under strong influences. It was like being pulled and squeezed within the bounds that held us which were being loosened with effort. Strangely enough we had no part in that effort. To wait patiently till conditions in the country changed would have been the ideal course for us, but the comrades who were out of jail

could not sit idle till their companions still inside were also free, and thus the issue was being kept constantly alive.

Japan laid down her arms on the 14th of August. The detenus and the security prisoners who had been detained for the period of the war could not be kept with any show of reason any longer. The Government began to release them in small batches.

The ban on various Congress committees was being lifted. The top-rank Congress leaders spoke their mind about various problems before the country. The Communists and the Muslim League had taken full advantage of Congressmen's absence from the political field and disseminated views of their own, but now the Congress view was being put forth with all the force that it required. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Pandit Pant and others criticised the anti-Congress and pro-League attitude of the Communist Party. Moulana Abul Kalam Azad had made clear the Congress stand regarding the Pakistan demand. The Congress stood for a united India, but it would never coerce the Muslims or any other minority who did not want to remain in it, declared the Congress President.

The Viceroy had gone to London and brought fresh proposals. According to these proposals general elections were to be held all over India, and a constitution-making body set up to prepare an agreed permanent constitution for India.

The restrictions on the Press and on public workers were to be removed in order to leave them free for the electioneering campaign. Several M.L.A.'s including our old friends S. Partap Singh and Ch. Kartar Singh were released one by one. A large number of Congress detenus and security prisoners were set free in batches. There was no general amnesty, no wholesale releases which the Congress President had demanded, and scores of prisoners were yet behind bars kept for "security reasons."

The President visited Lahore in connection with the Congress work in the Punjab and came to see us in the jail on the morning of 8th October. He was accompanied by the Minister for Jails, Sir Manohar Lal, and several Congress leaders including our old friends Moulana Daud Ghaznavi, now the President of the Provincial Congress, and Ch. Kartar Singh and Seth Sudarshan. The interview took place in the office of the Superintendent.

Moulana Azad looked much pulled down and the state of his health was alarming. He had not been feeling well for some time and the strain of overwork since his release had given him

no chance to recoup his health. We saw his imposing figure sink into the chair and took our seats close to him.

He told us that he was pressing for the release of all political prisoners including terrorists. He could find no peace in his heart, he said, until we all were free. He informed us that he had been in correspondence with the Viceroy, who had written to him that the cases of those who had undergone more than fourteen years of imprisonment would be considered.

We thanked him for his efforts. He hoped that we would be set free in the near future.

The President then went inside the jail to see the security prisoners confined in two different wards.

There could be no greater advocate of the political prisoners' cause than the Congress President. We reposed our faith in him then fully implying our faith in the country, in her future, and we were content.

Time passed on; we are now interested more in men than in books. What can a prisoner gain from long imprisonment except toleration and the capacity to see both sides of a picture, if the necessary mental prerequisite is lacking? But what after all was the value of that toleration and understanding to me when all the past fifteen years of my life had been spent in fighting for small things and insignificant considerations? The noble instinct of man, which finds satisfaction in working for a noble cause or a great ideal, and can release tremendous energy for social work is liable to suffer from lack of employment. Our life has seen no rise and fall, no emotional upheavals, no vicissitudes of fortune. The instincts for love, for friendship, the strong desires for protecting the weak and combating the strong have all combined to find vent in a nervous restlessness easily convertible into bellicosity. We had been from time to time subjected to unhealthy influences and unnecessary struggles and that was how we had acquired and got rid of health fads, exercise fads, food and diet fads; insult, inferiority (or superiority) and persecution complexes and thus carried on an unremitting internal struggle parallel to that against external conditions.

The struggle complex is still in us as the abiding condition of life. Fifteen long years have passed. I have come to the cross-road, where love leads, understanding clears and sympathy brightens the path. But these qualities are in me in the form of cherished objectives and not creditable achievements. They can never be achieved. Many illusions have met their end in the

past, and the retention of the remaining few is an absolute necessity. Our conduct might have been quite different, but for the fixed idea of maintaining the self-respect and dignity of political prisoners during our captivity. Many a possible mutual strife had been prevented by this hard-imposed self-control. It was partly due to the fear in the background, of affording opportunity to the jail officers to exploit our differences.

Our relations with the jail officers nowadays are exceptionally harmonious. The Superintendent is a perfect gentleman and as sympathetic towards us as his official duties can possibly permit. The jail officers also feel that we are going to be released soon. The Superintendent is a patient, cool-headed person with new ideas and new schemes for the improvement of the lot of the prisoners. He is interested in removing corruption and likes to invite suggestions of a helpful nature. The difficulty is that the staff does not fully co-operate with him. His progressive ideas are an anachronism, little suiting the mind of the hardened "men-herds," the officers who have inherited the art of treating prisoners like cattle. He is working under great handicaps. Whenever we go to the office, we usually find a queue of officers lined up outside his office. The Superintendent peruses every paper carefully before signing it. The waiting officers have been used to thoughtless decisions, careless signatures, and cursory inspections. "The difficulty is that he does not know how to work," remarked an officer to me. "The difficulty is that he has a legal mind and wants to do justice to all," I observed smilingly.

"Does he know what laws should mean to us? The laws are made for smoothness, for facilitating and expediting work and not for creating impediments in the day-to-day routine," he retorted.

"The fact that he has checked corruption to a degree and improved the food of the prisoners speaks for itself," I persisted.

"May God help him but can he ever succeed by losing the sympathy of his staff?" asked the officer in an overwrought pious mood.

He had touched the real problem, viz., that of co-operation. He had, however, no notion of obtaining the prisoners' co-operation too without which no progress was possible. Nothing except giving them the legal and social status of partnership in the common struggle for the betterment of the society inside jail, could procure fruitful results. The good work of one officer was easily undone by another. A facility obtained by some well-meaning prisoners was misused by others and the muddle of the

prison administration continued. No fundamental change in the relationship between the officers and the prisoners had come about within the past fifteen years and our experience had made us indifferent towards temporary efforts of the latter and make-believe progressive trend in the former.

"The Government have no idea of fixing a limit to the days of our imprisonment, and if we knew how to suffer silently like Mahatma Parmanand of Jhansi, they would never mind our breaking the record of twenty-three years excluding remission set up by him," remarked Pandit Rupchand one day but added hopefully, "We can't be in for long because they would be unable to resist the demand of the country."

This optimistic note struck by him was something recent in his talks, because he had been always more pessimistic than any of us. He would either astonish us by making a very realistic observation, or raise a contradictory voice by exaggerating the dark side of a picture. "What if we get released today?" he suddenly asked enthusiastically.

"I would think as though I had been imprisoned only yesterday and begin my life from the beginning," was my swift answer to the most ticklish question that he had ever put.

And I talked as I thought. "The past is past. What would have been the net result had we not taken to political work and limited ourselves to an unpretentious and uneventful family life? We would have earned a lot or might have been living from hand to mouth but it would have been the end of our ambitions in every way. The success or failure of a life is immaterial to the man whose outlook gradually narrows down to the welfare of a few ailing children and unimaginative relatives. We have the wherewithal to re-enter the world with enthusiasm and hope. We have lost nothing if we have not lost our ambitions."

"The mutually destructive policies of different political parties and the resultant rivalry and hatred are a serious handicap in the path of progress. What do you say about it?" he asked.

"You should believe in what is right and work according to the dictates of your conscience."

"The difficulty about me is, you know, that I make a great distinction between good and bad, fair and unfair, noble and base, and always judge men by an impractical standard. The signs of a good man to me are the conditions and circumstances of life permitting his evolution from good to better, from better

to best, for himself as well as for society. In politics he who climbs down from national to communal, from communal to sectional and from sectional to personal has something basically wrong, a converse notion of progress. The greatness of man lies in his ability to discard narrowness of outlook all along the path of his life. But you know that Mr. X of the * * * Party would prefer one of its most unscrupulous and unprincipled members, Mr. Y, to Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest man of the modern age. Don't you daily hear of people in these days of general elections, changing fronts and donning new labels, and blowing the ideals of truth and faith to the winds? "

The Pandit was nowadays seriously thinking of how he would continue the work in the cause of the national struggle. Sometimes the plan of starting a nationalist newspaper appealed to him. He usually thought of working on a non-party basis.

My views did not differ very much from his but my proposed line of action was different. I laid more stress upon political rather than social handicaps in our path. I felt that in this age of matter and machine and inevitable uplift of the mental plane, truth and religion are not sufficient as guiding principles for humanity. See and judge, decide and act and go on and on! The spirit of quest, the goading of necessity and the disillusioning spur of reality have always disregarded and must disregard those pious sentiments of old. Progress is the word. Harness to its van the frailties and errors, impieties and truths, shades and lights, in short all you possess, and make a pull forward! A little better than ever, a little higher than before, a bit more of efficiency and executive capacity than the world-humanity has hitherto possessed, is the supreme criterion. March forward with energy and spirit. That is all we lose as well as gain in every effort ; why bother about the fading lights on the complexion of humanity!

We are preparing for a new life, but it is yet to come!

CHAPTER 24

BEFORE THE GALLOWS

ABOUT fifteen and a half years have passed in jail. I do not feel inclined to look back. The country has gone forward in its march towards freedom and so has our little world in its limited way. The black bread that broke in the hands of the prisoners on being touched has given place to a better whole-wheat *chapatti*. Lynching of the prisoners has become a rare phenomenon. The officers especially the new well-educated recruits into the service, are seldom seen to misuse their powers. This is all for the better, but the life of the prisoner is still uneasy. The reason is that there has been no fundamental change in the laws though much improvement has been effected in the matter of their application. Men in the service are better because of a general progressive trend in the country.

We stand at the threshold of freedom.

"Let us see the gallows," I requested the Superintendent one day. A man was to be hanged and my comrades and I wanted to see the execution.

We entered the condemned prisoners' ward, the terrible old place where I had spent six months in a cell. The dying man's cell was opened and the tying and handcuffing process completed within a few minutes. He was a well-built Sikh in the prime of his youth, who had turned Muhammadan under fear of execution. He had changed his name hoping thereby to avert his fate. "I am not * * * Singh; I am * * * Khan," he remonstrated before the Superintendent.

"There is nothing in the change of name," replied the latter.

A minute or two passed and he was led to the gallows. He mounted the steps of the killing structure and stood on the plank. The hangman put the noose around his neck and he said "Do not press so hard!"

His words were cut short by the falling of the plank beneath him. He was hanging from the rope within three minutes of his starting from the condemned cells. What a lightning stroke his life had met! The executioner was so swift, so machine-like, so skilled!

The executed man had killed his wife because she was unfaithful to him. His own death was a more elaborate process spread over months of agonising wait, and culminated today in the most brutal manner ever devised by man!

His body, completely lifeless, swayed to and fro at the end of the rope. He was like the pendulum of the clock of death, giving in its rhythmical tone a warning to the blind and unimaginative living who knew not the worth of human life.

His execution was a surprising feat of human ingenuity. I had *expected the process to last longer. I had come to see but in fact saw nothing, at least of the pre-execution process.* I climbed up to the gallows and saw him from above. He was dead. The rope's swing lent movement to his remains! His hands and feet were turned blue; his neck could be fully caught between two fingers.

Now the doctor came and testified to his death. They took him down, and carried him to the iron bedstead placed a few steps in front of the halter. His black dress and black cap, his handcuffs and shoulder-straps, were removed and his body placed in the coffin supplied by the jail. They raised his head and closed his eyes and lips. He seemed to be yet living, able to see and speak! The flexibility of his body was the same as of a living man!

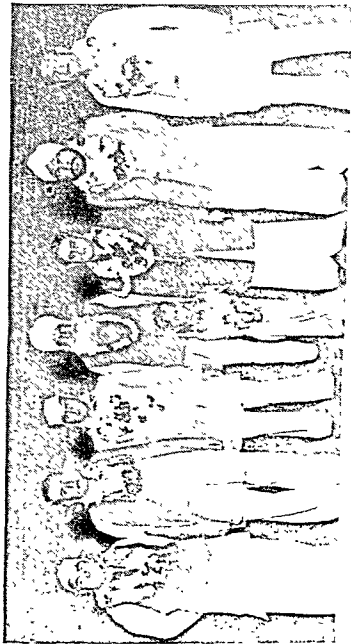
The neck, what had become of it? It seemed to be squeezed out of existence. He was otherwise the same as before starting from his cell.

He appeared in my dreams. His death was like a warning, told in the language of images, whispers, hard knocks for the thinking apparatus! A week passed before I could become my former self.

I pray to society at large to reconsider its plan of justice and revise its methods of carrying it out!

Postscript: We the five lifers and Babu Gurmukh Singh who had been sent to our ward a few days back were released unconditionally on the 13th of February, 1946!

AFTER RELEASE



Standing from left to right (1) Pt. Kishorilal, (2) Swami Himsri, (3) Pt. Bhagwat Daxal, (4) Babu Gurumukh Singh, (5) Pt. Rupchand, (6) Author S. Gulab Singh and (7) Malik Kundan Lal.